

THE HAIRPIN-DUCHESS

ALICE WOODS

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THE HAIRPIN DUCHESS

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BY
ALICE WOODS ✓



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY

1924

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THE HAIRPIN DUCHESS

*"Spare my poor cousin, Marquise.
She is eminently ridiculous, but
I love her sincerely."*

Louis XIV to Madame de Montespan.

THE HAIRPIN DUCHESS

I

NELSON AND SEYMOUR

"You must be flush, buying all these American Magazines, Nelson. 'Cost like the devil here, eh? However, the pleasure is mine!" Seymour stretched and yawned, then out of sheer laziness, dropped his magazine over the side of his bed. "Funny story, that—I don't mean funny—." He looked contentedly about the big bedroom with its pleasantly curtained windows, one pair drawn out over chair-backs to let in the air. He switched off his electric reading-lamp, and lighted a cigarette, and glanced over at the bed in the opposite corner. "Asleep?"

"Yes—thanks," came the faint cynical answer.

"Great idea of mine, making a living-dining

room out of your bedroom, and a kitchen out of your closet, eh? With old Mélanie to cook for us—pretty darn nice, our Sunday night parties, eh?”

No comment.

Seymour, just out of sleep and very loquacious, talked on, entertaining himself. He turned on his side looking down at the magazine on the floor. “That story *gets* me, rather. Paris-American stuff, you know. Like us, lovely tender blossoms, going round with our untransplantable roots in the air. We’re blossoms, all right, eh?”

For an instant Nelson’s grey eyes showed their colour but he did not speak.

“Funny thing about us—living here—putting up with discomforts and paying high for them. Damned if we don’t seem to be sort of flattered by them, and their prices. Funny thing. Why the dickens do we stay?”

“Exchange,” whispered Nelson.

“Oh come off, Nel! We aren’t all just Tom-fool gamblers!”

“No—?”

“No!” thundered Seymour laughing at the noise he made. “Maybe it’s—the climate,” he

shivered. It was June and all but midday, and they were sleeping under blankets, and the green of the leafy trees showing like a contradiction between the curtains.

For an instant Nelson opened his eyes and peered at the magazine with its brightly printed cover showing up on the dark rug.

"Maybe it's enough, just living it out in the lovely place. Don't ask me!"

"I didn't," Nelson reminded him.

Seymour sat up, irresolute and trowselled and yawning from ear to ear. "June!" he complained, "cold as March." He scratched his head, looking at the clock on his night-table. It was a little leather-cased toy his mother had given him. He groaned over the hour and turned the clock to the wall. Irritated he looked at Nelson, who was flat on his back and sleeping again.

"Read the story, old man. It will do you good—"and suddenly he stooped, and sent the magazine flying across the room. It flapped against the wall, then fell beside Nelson on his bed.

Nelson turned his head, put out a long thin hand and gently smoothed the ruffled pages.

Seymour stood, yawning and stretching.

"It's the grim tale of an old bird and his beloved wife. You are sure to be an old bird and you may have a beloved wife. For her sake, I'd hate having you fail. This old bird in the story fails. Read it!"

Nelson put out his other long thin hand and lighted a cigarette. "What is the name of your story?"

Seymour on his way to the bath-room, stood still rumpling his hair, and trying to remember. "Oh, I know, "Failure's Wife." Funny title. I don't mean exactly funny."

"You never do," murmured Nelson. "Who wrote the story?"

"Dashed if I know. Never looked," Seymour spluttered his answer from the bath-room, and followed up the confession with a great deal of shuddering under the cold douche.

"You'd be more interesting at six minutes to eleven in the morning, to say nothing of the same significant hour of the evening, if you looked oftener at titles and their authors and less often at your damned brass-faced little clock," said Nelson tranquilly.

Seymour, wrapped in his bath-towel, drip-

ping water off his big young feet, dashed to the window and drew aside the curtains, fairly drenching the room with light.

"Thanks so much," smiled Nelson, "I like light, when it's handed to me."

"Great day but funny weather. The sun's shining like a new brass franc, but it's so cold."

"Like an American sweet-sour sauce, or sugar and vinegar on tomatoes, eh?" commented Nelson.

Seymour looked around at him as he dried himself in the sun. "Got a hump, eh?" he laughed.

Nelson was lying with a magazine upon his breast, his thin arm folded across it. "I've read your story," he said, his eyes closed, his voice half-sleepy. "I even know the man who wrote it, rather well. I've known him all my life. It is the sort of thing you'd call funny, if you knew how well, how long, I've known him. I only really came to know him while we were face to face, during the "great war." That was the valuable thing *I* got out of it, knowing him. We were in the hospital together. Both of us pretty well bashed up, and

fed up. We weren't homesick, for we knew our way about over here, and liked it. We liked it here better than there. We'd meant to stay on and play, so of course we stayed on and fought. We went in together in the first stormy days, before the long heavy rain and eternal mud had set in. We're still in," he shuddered, his voice so low that Seymour could not flatter himself that he cared whether he listened or not. "War-talk sounds odd now, but that's the way it was."

Seymour, intrigued, came to the foot of Nelson's bed, stood drying his hair, listening.

"I was the dutiful brute of the two," Nelson went on. "I hated war less than he did. It killed him to kill. He had to confess himself constantly a fragile ass. He liked women, and dining out, and beautiful things, and clean fine hands. He'd had those sort of things all his life. He owned a satin-wood desk that somebody told him had belonged to Julie de Lespinasse. Until the war, he thought he could not write, except at that desk. He very much liked the woman in that story, the "beloved wife" of the "old bird that failed," as you put it, Seymour. In real life she was twice his

age. An adorable person, beautiful, and silky, and gentle. She had a great deal to do with making him decent, or, intentionally so."

"What's the great idea in keeping a man like that all to yourself?" Seymour's voice was dry, a little hurt.

"He's so brittle," said Nelson. "'Hates a row, and ruts. He has to be let alone. Curls up if he's touched. He has rewritten the stuff he sketched then, in the hospital, and after, and has sold them rather easily. They have made no stir. A short story is likely to be just so much water in a basket. He is doing a novel now. 'Doesn't give a damn about anything else.'" He opened his long narrow grey eyes and considered Seymour, who was listening, his face working with revelation, his towel trailing absurdly about him.

Nelson observed him appreciatively. "You look like an animated Autumn Salon," he laughed.

"Well, that's an awful thing to say to a man," said Seymour, then, seriously, "You seem to know this writer-chap very well?"

Nelson got up very carefully and put his bolster and pillow at the foot of his bed, loos-

ened the covers, then got in again, with his back to the light. "I'll read this over again," he opened the magazine. "Interesting to see if I like it now as well as I did then. One changes," he smiled, then added, "Fortunately."

"Why don't you bring him to one of our Sunday night dinners?" asked Seymour still standing, puzzled.

"I've thought of it," Nelson shot his friend a glance. "But we'd bore one another, a lot of bank-pups and an author! We'd have to play up. He has to live in his shell, and we have to live out of ours, eh?" He opened the magazine and found his place.

Seymour's big hands clutched the foot of the bed on either side of Nelson's pillow. He stooped, and over Nelson's shoulder read, this time both title and author, "Failure's Wife" by Richmond Nelson.'

For the moment the room was still except for the Sunday sounds that came in through the open window. Seymour came round to the side of the bed and stared down at Nelson. "You wrote the thing, Nel?"

"Somebody had to, old man," Nelson smiled.

Seymour stared like a sleep-walker, "But your job—? You are perfect in your job. Better than any of us. When do you have time? When do you do it?" He slowly began to laugh. "That's what you are up to when you disappear? And we thought it was some fool girl!"

"It is infinitely more fatal, old man, than any mere fool girl," said Nelson.

"But where?"

"I've a place across the river. The job pays for it." His thin jaw set. "As to time, I take it. Time is any man's you know. I haven't luckily, the lighter vices, or they haven't me. It's a most interesting question just how much time the lighter vices take."

Gravely Seymour wrapped himself again in his towel and stood at the head of Nelson's bed helping himself to a cigarette. "It's no wonder you look off your feed. It accounts for your being so damned touchy. How long do you think you can keep it up?"

Nelson gave an amused gesture. "Go along and shave. I want to read."

"But a man can't keep that up—two jobs as far apart—"

Nelson broke in, "But it is just that that makes it possible. A clean cut, and," he laughed, "so complete a change of air that it seems fresh. Besides, why not? All the art-game is changed. Artists and authors look like bankers. No more velveteens, no more long hair. I simply go "the whole hog" and am both one and the other. I am what I am and also what I appear to be. One of myselfs pays the bills for the other, or has done until lately. It's been about neck and neck the last two or three months."

Seymour stared, gave a gesture, failed for words.

"You think it—funny?" Nelson laughed up at him.

"No, I'm damned if I do," said Seymour, walking heavily back to the bath-room, hunched in his towel, the fringe ends trailing, catching Nelson's quick eyes, making him laugh. "Wait till I've got dressed. We'll go into this," said Seymour.

"We will not," said Nelson. "Not an inch farther than we've been in."

Stolidly, with his jaw set, Seymour trailed his towel back to the bath-room. "Is that so?" he said without turning his head.

FAILURE'S WIFE

A Story by

RICHMOND NELSON

I

IT was Christmas week and she'd come down town in a taxi to do her shopping. Christmas bored her but she had gifts to buy for people whom it did not bore. She'd lunched down town, was tired, had found nothing to buy but trash and tinsel. A flurry of rain had driven her to the arcades of the rue de Rivoli. It was a handsome storm and it drew her eyes away from the glittering shop-windows to the skies above the trees in the gardens, where the heavy clouds were dashing rain down, drenching a light snow back into the earth, rolling over the pavements, great drops splashing and singing in with the splattering motor-cars.

Being there, she drifted into Rumpelmeyer's

for her tea. Years ago, before the war, and before the shop had become an American protectorate, she'd liked going to Rumpelmeyer's. She had lived so long in Paris that her sense of the place was permanent and she shared resentment against these lighter "occupations" of her countrymen, especially of her countrywomen. But, at Christmas time the Americans were in Egypt, Algiers, Nice. Some of them were even at home. It was likely to be more like the old times, when Paris was visibly French.

She chose a little table with one chair, a bachelor's table. The place was lovely—a garden of women, all satiny and as bold as brass, and with their doll-like men. But she liked them and their gamey way of meeting their peace. Their new cynical peace. She thrilled to their intelligence that permitted itself the risk of seeming lightness. She closed her eyes a moment to catch the acid sweetness of their gaiety. It was like sitting by a fountain in the warm sun, whimsical breezes dashing the cold spray upon one, shocking exquisitely. Then there came two Americans into the place; intelligent, important and tremendously well-dressed. Instantly they found her, recognized

her for a country-woman, included her with a flicker of gay warmth in their fine eyes. They were tall, fair, ample. They were "onto themselves," good-natured and curious as youngsters. They looked her over, friendly enough, but as if they'd strip her of shop addresses. Their own hats were lovely and priceless, and set above their flat-heeled American shoes, gave them a so amusing look of big school-girls on a jaunt.

"You know, Dot," said the younger one, the less married-looking of the two, "I guess we'd better cut out the tea and just have a n'ice cream. Tea takes so darn long. It's one on the tea when it doesn't. It's miles down to that musty old Chatelet. I've simply got to hear that Kakin Adagio. I don't know why I'm so keen on it, but I am. The show won't wait for little old us, will it?"

Listening, lightly amused, she suddenly got their drift, forgot them in what they had to say. A concert? Chatelet? She tried to remember what was going on, what day of the week it was. She glanced at her wrist-watch. Music anyway. She might have luck, might get a place. Shopping forgot, she paid for her

tea, and in a moment was in a taxi, rushing down town through the spattering rain.

II

At the Chatelet she was able, luckily, even at the late hour, to buy herself a small loge. Shut inside its red-lined box-like walls, with its gilt-edged window open to the stage she felt, gaily, as if she'd bought herself a sort of house, a music-house. She put her fur coat, her hat, her gloves, her bag upon the chair beside her. She smiled and stroked the soft fur and laughed; her things looked so absurdly in her images. She'd been having her middle-aged Christmas blues and was feeling weary of foibles. She'd liked to have stripped off her rings and chains and bracelets, to have taken out hairpins, to have put her pretty high-heeled shoes under the edges of the fur coat. To be rid of harness for an hour. For an hour of music!

"Centenaire de César Franck," she read at the head of her programme. But she'd forgotten—had meant to come. This was riches! A programme of his pupils' work, friends of hers

among them—d'Indy, de Breville, Kepin, and the rest. Then, to send the world back to the world again, the great symphony in R. Mineur, with Franck, himself on the solitary heights. She glanced curiously over the house to see if the two Americans had arrived. She found them in a loge like hers, across the house. She felt grateful to them, but they did not know her of course, without her hat!

Even in the eliminating twilight of her forty-sixth year, she loved her music more than ever ardently. She drew her chair back where, sheltered from the great house, she could perfectly see the stage. And the vast stage thrilled her with its music-racks, chairs, instruments, lights, all waiting for its musicians and its hour of voice. Why had no one ever painted a picture of a stage like that, waiting? It was very like her own life, the stage so beautifully ready, so empty. Once upon a time she had loved a musician, and had waited till even now, for him. Now, musicians didn't much matter; it was music that she loved. And, she laughed to condemn herself, always a Puritan. Even her way of having given up was a way of being true. This unexpectedly coming to music

stirred her, brought herself up, quivering, to her hard-earned surface.

III

The musicians came on, the house darkened, the lights above the stage fairly drenching hands and linen, catching upon the rims of eyeglasses, rings, and the white pages of music. Their manner of settling, of tuning up, gave her a sense of perfect occupation, of the superb apathy of skill.

"Kakin's Adagio pour instruments à cords." Lovely, lovely! She liked the American over there for caring for it, and liked her too, for not knowing why. Her eyes wide, her hands relaxed, she let go of focus, held to nothing in the world but the forest of bows and their clairvoyant hands. Suddenly, and wholly shocked by the rushing in of personality, she caught the full gaze of a violinist whose head was not bent, whose hands seemed so oddly to play alone. His head seemed, for the distressing moment, to lift over all the music and moving hands, to jeer her gravity like an ogling serpent, while his voluptuous eyes laughed over her movement of trapped and outraged rapture.

"All through my life, my life goes with me," she sighed, and covered her eyes with her hands. Surely she knew the man. His face was so oddly familiar—? But she could not know him. He was very young. Once she had known "everybody," but now, slowly musicians had retreated from their life, their salon, and the worldly patrons and peacocks who supported music has replaced them. In their salon, like something dead and draped, stood a great velvet-covered piano, and upon it lay a violin case, locked. She could not have crossed the path of this young man, but what beautiful skill, and what perfect impertinence!

She considered him, caring not at all what he might make of her considering. It was, after all, just the type that she knew. In profile he was like, so very like, her own husband. The type repeating, repeating. All over the faces there was the repetition, even as music repeats and repeats. In his gorgeous twenties her husband had looked as this man now looked, and had played, as this young man was now venturing to do, fervently, straight into her eyes. She knew now just how that sort

of fervor is cheap; mere strutting and circus brilliance. Talent abused. She knew no trace of pride in being its object. She knew that her whitening hair looked blonde in the vast red and gold dimness; knew that she looked young for her age even in a midday glare. She wished that he knew and would let her be. The lights flared and fell, flared and fell. She slipped back into her loge as far as she could, only to listen, free of the young man's high-poised head and ardent eyes. She saw her husband again, his cameo head lifted towards his heights, his bright halo of silver. There'd been a splendid time when he'd seemed to touch the fires of interpretation to light; had seemed to recreate. And then, something had happened, she'd never known just what. She'd lost him. She had ceased to be a mystery to him; ceased to hold him. Perhaps she'd been tiresome with her too great belief and ambition. She'd wanted reality; he'd wanted mystery, the praise of shadows. It was inevitable. He'd turned away from her, found his mystery in other women who did not make him conscious of reality. Women who praised him, spoilt him, weakened him. He'd spent his strength in smiling upon them as this

young man was smiling upon her. There came a shameless time when he'd stop work to laugh with any woman. Even then he'd sometimes rushed the heights. Then he'd fall, and he'd fail to retrace the way, for he really did not know the way. She had struggled, had pleaded, she had striven against her own awakened spirit, trying to be all sorts of women to him. Then hope died its death. He'd inherited money—a great deal of money. He'd strutted, chattered, decked himself out, and he'd given over work entirely. And now, old, and afraid of himself in gallantry, he'd grown hard and mean. Cruel, to cover his shame in himself, to stiffen his thin-worn vanity. All of his baffled and irritated skill came forth, for just her, in his fine-edged meanness. And, what of her? Herself? In spite of it all, perhaps in pity because of it, she'd trailed faithfully, all the way along his bright and chattering way of futility.

He went on, this young man, playing there on the stage, ogling her. It hurt her to so understand him. He mattered no more to her than the discarded programmes, scattered over the aisles, squares of white on the dark red carpet. That he played to pattern was a mir-

acle she gave thanks for. Then at last the final splendid symphony released her; made her think of César Franck, of the solitary man, the artist working against the tide all his life; working serenely. At last she listened only, released, detached. And when she came down the stairway into the brilliantly lighted exit, saw her ardent fiddler standing, in full glare, a broad soft hat shadowing his peering face, his hands posed, one glove on, one off, like Titian's "man with the glove," she lifted her head that he might see her face and the lines that life had earned for her, turned that he might see that her hair was grey, not blonde, and she laughed with amusement when she saw him all but run to lose himself in the crowd. Then straightway she forgot him, and she taxied up town to her home, her mind quieted and at peace. The storm had passed and a clear fresh early evening sky shone over the gardens as she passed Rumpelmeyer's again. It seemed so oddly long since her tea there in the early afternoon.

IV

THE maid let her into her warm, softly-

lighted, beautiful apartment. She stood, listening to voices.

"Madame has visitors," said the maid discreetly. "Three ladies are in the salon—with Monsieur."

Over the silk curtains, through the glass doors, shone the lights. She went in, just as she was, in her hat and furs. And there he sat, the handsome ruin, surrounded beautifully, worshipfully, as if with tourists!

Three of her friends they were, all Paris-Americans, circled in deep chairs about his deep chair. The light above him gilded his longish, waved, silvery hair. Against the velvety background of his mole-coloured waistcoat, his fine hands played with the ribbon of his eye-glasses. A little table centered the group, glittering softly with its decanters and glasses. Furs sagged richly over the chairs to the polished floor. One of the three, younger than the others, her chair close to his, dropped her hand from his arm, the glittering jewels the hand wore fairly crying the tale of where the hand had been lying, and her face gave a startled, silly, guilty smile.

"My *dear!*" he cried out at her, "where on *earth* have you been?"

"I?" she smiled and gave her hands to her friends. "I've been—oh, ever so far away from here!"

She laid her hat and furs aside, stood by a mirror, adjusted her flattened hair. She smiled at them in the mirror. How finished they were, she thought; how satiny, and silly, and beautiful, and sweet. And how they did love their chatter; loved being so tremendously *in* everything, so sure, so "au courant." She looked at him and caught the reflected smile, his senile smile, and the ant-like glint of his dark eyes, ready to be mean.

"My *dear,*" he sent her a gay and gossipy laugh, "do spare us suspense. Do tell us just where. You have such a frightening way of not quite saying things!"

She smiled at him. Really he was perfect in his way, a perfect failure at least. It was something. She carried her hat and fur, to the piano and laid them beside the locked violin case. Her hand rested a moment on the case, touched the lock; she wondered if he even knew what he had done with the key. Then she turned,

leaning in the curve of the piano, and she looked at him again, ever so lightly. "I have been at the other end of the world, listening to music, my dear. Listening to you, as you used to play to me when we were young, and beautiful and poor, and hopeful—"

II

STRAWS

SEYMOUR, fairly resplendent for his Sunday of ease and food and girl, came back to Nelson. His hat on the back of his head, he stood, lighting a cigarette, watching Nelson. He was lying as if asleep. The clean cut edge of his light brown hair, his dark brown short thick lashes made him look, in his stillness and paleness, like a drawing of himself. He looked too old for his age—a man more made than in the making. “Feeling off your feed, old man?” Seymour asked with concern. He felt as if he’d never really seen this best friend of his, Nelson, before.

For a moment Nelson’s eyes opened, surprised to responsiveness, giving Seymour a faint shock. “Yes. What of it?” he laughed short-

ly, quickly on his guard. Then after a moment, "Who wouldn't be, after reading over something of yesterday's work, fatally wounded, in print. Curious thing, the way one doesn't quite do the trick."

"It's very well done *I* think," said Seymour. "Mystery to me. I creak a groan over a letter even."

Nelson studied the well-dressed, prosperous looking young man before him. "Naturally. It's not your job. You are a clear case, a clean cut banker. It's in you and back of you. Banking. You'll go to the top old man, and by Jove, you'll look it, magnificently."

Seymour flushed. "Not very exciting, being so damn clean-cut. Everything handed to me, even the honors."

"Well, it's great," mused Nelson. "The little old war has tossed us all, bankers and poets, into the same dirty sack, eh? Dirt right into the bone. It's done for all of our neat little differences. Everybody looks, and feels even, just like everybody else, now that we're tossed out of the dirty sack and our straws are in the wind again. And the trouble is that the straws are not only dirty, but they've got mixed

up, are sticking to the wrong men. And it looks like a kind of game, and men are grinning like new devils, and won't swop back the other fellow's straws. And the wind isn't kind. It goes right on blowing in the same old way. Everybody is playing the other fellow's game. Just for the fun of it. Even you, blessed old Seymour, success born in you, fairly handed to you; even you, finding yourself "too damn clean-cut!" It's really great. You, resenting law and order!"

"For law and order, are you?" Seymour grinned. But he felt embarrassed. Nelson, in the new cross-light of two careers, evaded him.

"You bet your life I am," said Nelson. "If I didn't submit to order, where'd I be? I hate grubbing. It's weak, no doubt, but I want comforts. I can't be happy and bathless. I want furniture, and air, and housekeeping. I like regularity in food, linen, and eating pleasantly. I'm in no puritanical revolt against disorder and its murky charms, but order is for me a gift-bearing process. It adds to my benefits. With all my heart I thank, and submit to—the Bank! I say—Seymour? Not a word of this

story-writing to the others? Not—a—word! You understand?"

Seymour looked his disappointment. "I thought I'd tell 'em at dinner to-night. Have some champagne, eh?"

"I thought you would too, you duffer," Nelson glared at him.

"Why not? It would buck us all up. You seem to take it all pretty casually, but the rest of us—!"

"Well it wouldn't buck *me* up," said Nelson, his brevity making for eloquence. "My name is there, always at the head or the tail of everything I print. Let them learn how to read. There isn't a mother's son of you that looks at an author's name before he reads a story. Or after, for that matter."

"Is the place you work in far from here?" Seymour asked.

"It is."

"It must be tiresome, coming back here late at night, to sleep?"

"It is. But that's that. I like sheets and hot water. And it is nearer the bank in the morning."

"You'll cut out the bank when you've made a go with your stories?"

"You've no idea," Nelson laughed very softly, "how often I ask myself that. Just now—it isn't the question. I'm doing a novel. A long one that will take a long time. 'Will want a lot of doing. Another is at its heels. I'm a bit bashed up you know, and need comforts."

"You couldn't work here? I'll efface myself, and keep the others out," he suggested awkwardly.

"That's very decent of you, Seymour, but it can't be done. Do you care about seeing my shop?"

Seymour flushed and smoked hard. "Just ask me!" he said eagerly. "You'll be on hand for dinner to-night?"

"You could count on me at any dinner to-night that lets me out of moving, thinking. Something tells me that I'm going to stay right here all day."

Seymour sang a "so long then," from the door and hurried away, already late for his Sunday luncheon.

Nelson, alone, closed his eyes and thought of Seymour—restless, lately, as a pup wanting a

master. Anxious, like a pup, and touching, too. A good sort of pup. He let his mind drift over the strange new problems: over his men friends, Paris friends, and Paris-Americans. He compared them, the Americans, with the Frenchmen he knew. All of them, American or French, struggling with their readjustments, their complications, their mixed up straws. Restless, restless.

He thought of the curious new softness of young men. In every café one saw them, faces and ways as soft as a girl's, and the girls walking by, as hard as nails. Girls refusing to be ever any more, the classical prey; men gone soft without their classical hunting to keep them in trim. The classical background was finished, was shot to bits. Not that Nelson lamented that, or resented in the least the modern softened men and hard, hard girls. He liked it, or he liked looking into it, getting at it, attending the wake of the old ways and means.

He thought of a Frenchman he'd met one night lately, when dining over at the Rotonde, the moment's favourite nest of thoughtful iniquity and its trailing souls. The Frenchman, a lawyer, had been about Nelson's age, and

visibly, even more war-battered. One side of his face was a mere fabric of scars. He was a wizened, young-old, blue-eyed and bearded little "avocat," even at dinner his portfolio with him, as if he never entirely left off work. He had a laughable way of speaking, thinking and moving in little gusts, then sitting mute and very still between times. After a dinner that had not gone too brilliantly they were all standing out in the night on the side walk again. Uneasiness and chattering possessed them at parting just as it had done, always does at meeting. The little avocat stood aside, thinking, listening, then with a very high-pitched and puffy gust of laughter, as if he'd proposed himself an adventure for reasons very much his own, he'd led them to another café, a few doors away, "to see something." There he had shown them three framed canvasses, "his own work"—the puffy, wizened little avocat's own work! They were framed, and hung there, for sale! Every café on the left bank, where the artists gather, is now also a sort of picture mart, and, astonishing fact, the canvasses of the little avocat were no better, no worse, than the other things hanging about them, though

he never for one moment pretended that painting was his job.

Then, the dull little party about to scatter, wakened up. Really became interesting and significant. Faces reddened, or laughed, or wondered. There was protest astir. The young American woman who had given the party, a slim, bobbed, ear-ringed, gold slippered person, and wrapped about in a gorgeous evening coat, faced the little avocat. He was her lawyer. That was why he was there, at her party.

“But, where on earth? When? When do you have time to paint? I never heard of such a thing in all my life. My husband is a lawyer in New York, and, believe me, he hasn’t time to even think about paint!” That she was even then divorcing him made him no less her argument.

The little avocat studied her, his blue eyes very grave. “What a pity for him,” he replied. “Over here we have our Sundays, our Saint’s-days, our “vacancies,” so that everybody has time.” He finished on a very high key, his voice rising after a happy convicting that, here at last, they had something on the Americans.

At the dinner there had also been a young chap in tweeds, and he'd stuck very close indeed to the lady of the gorgeous evening coat. Now, angry, he stood back for space. Though he looked like a stockbroker out in his business suit, he was really an artist. He was a young man of "métier" of belief in "school," with his good shoes well planted upon the old, old road to Rome. The scarred face of the little avocat sniffed and quivered, and his bright blue eyes laughed with delight. "Will you kindly tell *me*," came the challenge from the Roman road, "what you think you are doing to *art*? Putting your things up *for sale*! You, a lawyer! You and dabblers like you, are at the bottom of the whole horrible situation, I tell you!"

"Oh, but I *do* sell them!" The little avocat fairly danced with delight and excitement. "Quite often, I sell! And why not, if they are liked, my pictures?"

The young man came, fascinated if revolted, to the edge of his wide, straight open road and he peered a long troubled moment into the little avocat's eyes. Then their laughter stirred his anger again, and he went back to the center

of his road. "What would *you* have to say about it," he demanded, "if I, who don't know a blessed thing about law, were to come tearing into court among you chaps in your caps and gowns, knock over your chairs and mix up your papers, and begin pleading a case? How'd you like that?"

"Oh—," gasped the little avocat, looking like a wise little owl, out for a good time and daring to take darkness for light, "I think that it would be splendid—very good for *us*! We have gone on so very long, all in the same way, that it's all become "*à la cuisine*," you see? It might, if you would do that—rushing in and upsetting us—it might give us something new! Perhaps you will do it—when you are, one day, a little tired of painting? That is to say, of only painting. You surprising Americans!"

Then the party had melted away. The lady in the gorgeous coat and the young man from the road to Rome, going away together in a taxi, the little avocat on the side-walk, listening and watching. Nelson heard the lady say to the young man, very softly, "Maybe he's not as good a lawyer as I thought—?"

Nelson smiled over the world. He'd seen

too much of it for so young a man, thanks to the war. But he'd always been like two persons in everything, one of them looking on and able to smile over the troubles of the other. His magazine slipped from his hands, he relaxed and sighed, and slept again.

III

MR. DUNBAR PRESENTS

AT seven-thirty Dunbar had not arrived and Seymour and Nelson were mixing the third cocktail. Dunbar had telephoned that he would be late, but that he was bringing someone worth the waiting, "a peach." Anticipation ran higher as the cocktails went round and round. Chatham had brought a girl. He always did. She was a little, slim, white-faced, black-haired, folded-up-looking girl, very beautifully got up and self-absorbed. She was not disturbing. She was Chatham's girl, and no one else wanted her. Her name was Monique. Chatham, very fat, was already nebulous, and as red as Monique was white. Monique did not drink, knowing better. Nelson, because he needed it, took one cocktail, then stood off

waiting by a window. His thin white face glistened with fatigue, for an afternoon of writing had taken him by storm. The cool green of the leaves outside, patterned and played over by the street lights, gave him rest, hypnotised him with their cool endless repetition. "A lullaby of leaves," he called it to himself, wishing that, for an hour his tired mind would stop its work, stop calling things by names and phrases. When tired, it was his torture, phrasing things.

Then came Dunbar and his "Peach:" entered noisily, and with the exaggerated laughter that, gust-like, opens and closes doors upon stage-scenes and life-scenes alike. And Dunbar introduced his guest as "My old friend—not so awfully old!—Mrs. Raymond." Elsie Raymond, standing to her splendid inches, garbed sumptuously in blue and gold brocade, her too much of bright blond hair bound tightly into a turban of metallic cloth, fairly warranted Dunbar's boyish strutting and Nelson's murmured "Mr. Dunbar presents—"

The young men rushed and burbled round her like waves round an obstacle. Elsie, her eyes bright with the love of a good time,

glanced them over, laughing gaily to make things go. They all talked at once. Chatham got forth a maudlin "B' Jove, enchanted!" and sat back against Monique, his fattish pink hands flat on the table before him. Monique moved a little away from him, reddened her mouth with a lip-stick out of her mole-coloured sack, looked Elsie over, then sank into pose for a long patient evening.

"I told Jo'," Elsie went on, her eyes fixed inquisitively upon Monique, "that it was too awful to come like this. S'posing you all hate me, eh? But Jo said it was alright. You aren't to go to any bother. I lunched at two and ate the shop out of house and home. I tead at five, and had two strawberry tarts and two lovely cakes. All I ask is a chair. How those lovely looking French slippers do *hurt*! And oh my heavens—is it a cocktail that I see before me?"

"No'p," she broke in, answering Seymour for Dunbar, gaily, "Jo hasn't been keeping me all to himself. I'm no secret. Just landed Thursday. Came on the Olympic. Some canoe, eh?"

Nelson had come forward, been presented,

and stood amused, where he could watch her. "Crossed often?" he asked her, picking up her gold mesh bag, heavily set with turquoises, which she'd dropped as she stooped to unfasten a band of her beautiful blue slippers.

She looked at him, at her empty glass, at him again. She had a way of thinking a moment before she answered a question. She laughed and crinkled the painted dark about her gorgeous blue eyes. "Can't you see it sticking out all over me that this is the first time, and that I've been trying to buy everything in sight in twenty-four hours? Thanks—I'd love another," and she held her glass out to Seymour.

Monique opened her eyes and watched Elsie drink with the brightened gaze of one lovely woman who sees another taking up the way of certain destruction.

"Good night!" Elsie murmured to the others, looking back at Monique, "don't she talk English?"

"No," murmured Nelson, "nor American, nor even French, except in self-defence. She doesn't like to talk. It's tiring."

Elsie's head lifted and she looked at Dunbar,

then at Monique again, and her blond effulgence was warmed with an oddly young blush. "Oh is it!" she said aloud, but she thought of something she'd have to say to Jo Dunbar on the way home about the kind of people she cared to meet. Wasn't the girl all right? Luckily, Mélanie began serving the dinner. And Mélanie was a precious old reprobate and wholly melted to Elsie's splendours. By ten o'clock Chatham's head was on Monique's shoulder, and Monique herself somewhat more frankly significant. Elsie took a long look at the two of them. "I'll tell Jo Dunbar where he gets off for bringing me here with a street-rag!" she resolved. The "street-rag" had taken only a little wine at her dinner, her activity all bent upon her vermilion lip-stick and her yellowish powder. Nelson drank less than the others but he drew her out, made her talk more than she wanted to. He stirred her instincts to a dim sort of warning, made her feel that he was laughing at her. Who and what were all these men and the girl, the street-rag, anyway? She looked about the room. A nice room, nothing very wonderful about it. They were a "well-dressed bunch" she thought.

Recklessly she looked full into Nelson's eyes. "What is it all about?" she asked him.

Nelson cupped his thin hands about a match and lighted a fresh cigarette, the flare showing his thin face all keen and amused. He'd been drinking more than usual, and he was talkative. "I heard a good, queer little story the other day that is, maybe, the answer. An answer, at least. An old French lady of the provinces, a hot-headed, stingy old lady, lost her husband. She had loved him and she was horribly lonesome. She didn't know what on earth to do with herself. She began thinking that she'd got to die, too. She'd be with him again then, anyway. But what was all the money going to do for them then? She went off her head with reckless plans. A chapel over their grave—that was what she could do! She'd spend the money she could not take with her, on wonderful graves. She'd build them a tomb to keep off the eternal rains. She got drunk with the idea, went more and more mad. She became a miser in everything else, to have that much more to spend on the tombs. Nothing was too good. Someone stuffed her up with tales of the wonderful marbles she could buy

in Egypt. Nothing so beautiful anywhere else in the world. The price of the marble didn't phase her, but the distance, the cost of getting there, was awful. She investigated, she worried, she lost sleep. She ended by taking a third-class passage out in order to have that much more money for her marble. She started away—said good-bye to her home, to her husband's temporary grave. They sailed. Bad weather—wind and heat. She died on boardship. Being a third-class passenger, they would not, could not, keep her body, and she was buried at sea. "And that—" he paused, "is the end of the story."

"Oh my goodness," gasped Elsie, her face comical under her silver turban. She gave a gesture like a swimmer going down, her turquoises and diamonds catching the light. "Is it as bad as all that? *I* thought," she laughed, as if laughing might save something, "that you all came, and stayed, for drinks?"

"Is that why *you* have come?" asked Seymour, glancing at Nelson with a smile.

"Me? No," she grew grave, sitting there in all her expensive clothes, looking like a plump young child dressed up. "I came to get

one of those easy French divorces that everybody's talking about, if you *must* know. Don't I look it? Hadn't you guessed it?" She laughed recklessly, her recklessness hurting herself, and she flushed and turned her glass about, and wished she hadn't said it.

A shocked silence answered her, all the tipsy eyes in the room upon her,—and Nelson's eyes, cooled and suddenly veiled, the most trying of them all.

Elsie laughed again to keep up her courage. She wished she hadn't told them. What did they care? "Not that I am crazy about getting a divorce. Not on your tin-type!" She forced herself to return Nelson's icy smile with insolence.

"My tin-type?" Nelson lifted his brows. "I'm awfully sorry but I'm afraid I haven't one. Photography has gone rather far ahead, you know. And, if you don't mind, I'd rather you'd have your divorce on someone else's tin-type. I'd be sensitive about going as far as that!"

Elsie, her hands in her lap, her eyes wide open, looked at Nelson and listened; then she gave a tremendous, quick, ungoverned sigh. "I guess you think me an awful hick, don't you?"

Well—I am! A hick from Hickville. But if you think there is anything funny about getting a divorce, then you’ve got another think coming to you!” She was thoroughly and frankly hurt.

Nelson glanced at her as if she’d startled him. “I’m awfully sorry,” he said. “Do forgive me?” He laughed and stiffened his shoulders. “Aren’t we all just a little stewed?”

She smiled, childishly responsive, and glad to forgive.

“You see,” Nelson’s slim long hand played over her turquoises and gold vanity trinkets on the table by her coffee cup, “I am always so irritated by turquoise blue!”

“You don’t like turquoises?” she asked him, frankly shocked.

“No. I don’t like turquoises. But,” he smiled, “what of it?”

“You *have* got a grouch, Nel,” said Dunbar, sending Nelson a glance of warning behind Elsie’s silver-swathed head.

“Oh,” said Elsie, “I don’t mind. I’m used to it. It isn’t to be hoped that I married the only man on earth with a cronic grouch, is it?”

Nelson laughed and leaned his arms upon

the table, looking beyond Elsie and the smoky room with its flushed tipsy faces, out into the leafy night. "You mustn't mind me," he said to her with a sudden friendly smile. "You must learn to be very patient with me; with all of us; even when we are ill-natured, or don't like your turquoises. You see, for all our pretending, we are nothing but a lot of poor devils, on our way to Egypt, some of us travelling third, after wonderful mythical marble. And it looks stormy, and it's damned hot, and we don't feel awfully well—" he laughed.

"Good *night!*" said Elsie with an exaggerated shudder. "If I'm to come along often, we'll have to make it a sort of a syndicate." She smoked, and drank, and chuckled over her idea. "Jo tells me he's going to rush me, so you'll all have to come along. But you can take it from me that we won't travel third. And we won't go down. We'll hit the Marble, and if we like it, we'll buy it all, and have it sent home, eh?"

"Some quite worth while people prefer travelling third," said Nelson dryly. He rose and went back to the window, irritated.

Elsie, her wealth of fair soft arms upon the

table, watched him, her cigarette in her fingers, the insolence of timidity forcing her to be very bold and hard. "Well, you'll have some trouble to make me believe that." He glanced at her, then quickly away again. Elsie bit her lip, and with flustered irritation, felt herself blushing hotly.

Suddenly Nelson faced her, laughing at her, but in keen earnest all the same. "You are going to *want* to 'travel third' with the rest of them, too," he told her. "You stay long enough and you'll trade all your turquoises for one third-class ticket! You'll see. You're caught, even now," he laughed. "You'll *see*." Then Nelson saw that no one minded what he was saying; saw that they thought him drunk. He gave a gesture of disgust and went back to the window. His mind was blurred, ideas zig-zagging like vines across, the endless leaves at the window troubling him. "That's just why we are here," he stuck to it, held to his words one after the other. "Not so much to hit the marble, as you so uncomfortably put it, as to learn how to travel third. Third! At the very bottom again, with the bereft best of 'em, in a broken up old world—"

Elsie chuckled, watching him. "We're acting like a Cotter's Saturday night, eh?" She sang gayly, "Oh, father, dear father, come home with me now—"

"It's not Saturday night," said Nelson curtly, then stood facing the air and praying himself to be still.

Then Monique told Seymour that they'd better get Chatham outside. And Chatham speechlessly looked it.

IV

CAFÉ DE MADRID

A HALF hour later, Nelson, who had disappeared for a while, came back into the room with Elsie's coat upon his arm. The others had gone, except Elsie, Dunbar and Seymour. They could hear them all laughing down in the street below the open window, trying to get the collapsed Chatham into his taxi. Elsie sat staring at the table, turning her glass about, smiling, forgetting to go home. She blushed like a child caught in mischief at the sight of her coat. "It's dreadfully late," she stammered, "I'm too awful. I told you I was. I don't know when to go home even!"

"I have to propose," smiled Nelson, stroking the thin velvet and silver over his arm, "that

we four adjourn to a café where we may talk and breathe the air."

"Oh, a lovely idea," said Elsie, quickly appeased.

In no time a taxi was rushing them through the night to the Bois. They did not talk; the night air was upon them, they were meeting it, coming back to themselves, each in his own way. Then, at a little table out of doors, music and dancing going on in the brightly lighted restaurant, stars serenely gleaming overhead, they looked at one another, smiled refreshed, ready to begin all over again.

They smoked and chatted, and noted their neighbors. Nelson looked off at the shadows a while, then he said, "Dunbar knows, of course, but why not tell Seymour and me about yourself—why you are here? Let us know you, too—your whys and wherefores? Something tells me," he said lightly, "that we are going to see a lot of each other. The four of us. The Syndicate. Why not? I know, of course, that one doesn't ask a butterfly where she got her wings, but—it is a perfect night, a perfect hour and place for a story. A story about wings. The good tales have mostly been told

like that. Let's start an Arabian Nights of our own. Why not?"

Elsie watched him, fascinated. "You mean—tell you about Bill and me?" she asked, absorbing him.

"Why yes—about you and Bill," he smiled. "It isn't curiosity, you know. You are really so beautiful out here in the night in your blue and silver. A mere man wants, really wants, to know what has made you. Then perhaps he can guess what you really wish you were. If Dunbar knows it all he may toddle inside and dance. We can get along without Dunbar, eh Seymour?"

"Dunbar," said Dunbar, "knows no more about it than you do. I haven't seen the dear girl since she was sixteen, and in long golden pigtails!"

Nelson turned and looked oddly at Dunbar through the threaded light. "That makes a thrilling vision," he turned to Elsie. "One can take a golden hair to start with, and reconstruct, you know. You must have been superb in golden pigtails, Mrs. Raymond."

Nelson had a way of saying "Mrs. Raymond" that made Elsie sit up and want to be-

have herself. "They were perfectly good pig-tails," she murmured. She watched the dancers inside the café for a moment. People were looking at her. She sensed her power and loved it. "Some life!" she said softly.

"You see that tall blue-eyed young man, asking the American girl to dance?" Seymour asked Elsie, while Dunbar put a cigarette into her holder for her.

She nodded. "He's good-looking. Sort of Chinese-looking," she hazarded.

"That's clever of you," commented Nelson.

"He's a Russian, with a name to make Russians sit up," said Seymour. "He's devastated—not a sou, not an inch of earth left. He was brought up like a doll. They pay him fifty francs a night to dance out here. I know him. He says, 'No, I don't like it, mais que voulez-vous? I could be a chauffeur. Many of my friends are chauffeurs, but I'm not very strong and the climate is hard for me.' I asked him if he didn't hope to get something back; if it wouldn't change soon again in Russia. The poor devil looked into space. He looked Slav-ic then, if you like, his jaw, his cheekbones, his queer eyes. 'Revolutions take a very long

time,' he said. 'Perhaps—a change—in ten or twenty years.' I suppose he'll just have to dance it out!"

Elsie shuddered. "I'm sorry for him," she said, "but I'm not crazy about the idea of anybody's being payed to danced with *me*."

"You dear, good young child," said Nelson softly.

Elsie flashed him a laugh. "Paris makes me feel young, and goody—and *so* foolish!" she said. "You may not believe it, but when I first met Bill Raymond I was as slim as that girl who is dancing with your Russian. Honestly I was!"

Said Nelson, promptly, "There's one thing I think you'd never be able to do." He held her eyes, lightly but persistently.

"Me?" She was all inquisitiveness.

"Be—a liar," he answered. "I mean, not even a polite liar. If that brilliant gift had been added to the rest of you, you'd have upset these crazy times. Any times. You are absolutely disarmed with honesty. I believe, actually believe, that you *were* as thin as that girl, once upon a time! Tell us," he smiled

again, "where did you meet your Bill Raymond? And more about your golden pigtails?"

"Oh out there, where I live," she said absently. "Or, where I did live. I feel to-night as if I had *moved*. Maybe I have? You see it was before the war, two years before, and Papa wasn't rich then. We were just comfy, good-enough folks in a small enough town. Jo knows," she smiled at Dunbar. "Jo's was a best family, and Jo and I never met except at high-school. It's different now. Papa had a hairpin factory. It's a funny thing to have, but somebody has to make the darned things!"

"It's simply wonderful," said Nelson unbelievably.

Elsie thought it over. "Mama didn't think so," she chuckled. "Our town's awfully pretty, a river, and beeches and maples, and fields and groves all around. Before the war we used to have a good time out there. We know it now. And there was another little town not far off, a jiggetty little street-car running between. And out there in the meadows, was a country college. You ought to see it now!" she laughed. "Just booming, every which way! Then, it was shabby and needed paint. It was

a sort of surprise package, you know?—you'd go out to pick daisies and find a college!"

"Mama was born in another town," she went on, warming to her story, helped to franker frankness by the night, the place, the oddness of the Russian nobleman, dancing for fifty francs a night. "Mama's a climber for fair!" she laughed. "But Papa's so sweet, she just fell in love with him in spite of his hairpins. Papa inherited the factory. The worry of Mama's life has been what everybody calls our 'hairpin-money.' That gets Mama's goat."

"She had a regular mania for educating us kids above hairpins. My sister died. Too bad; she was like Mama, and might have made her happy. Mama just hates *me*. My brother's a slacker, and—I'm me. Poor Mama. It was a bad day for her pipe-dreams when she sent me out to that little old college. She wanted to send me east; to Wellesly, or Vassar. But Papa wouldn't have it. He backed me up, dear old Pop. He said that I was the only ornament in the home that didn't make him think of the price. I was a holy terror then, and just to spite Mama, dressed as much like a boy as I dared.

"I hadn't been in the college three hours before I'd fallen heels over head in love with Bill. He was my botany teacher. I liked botany—funny thing to like, but flowers are so lovely, aren't they?" She paused a moment to think how lovely they were. Flowers! The night, dark and rich about them, and all the drinks made thinking of lovely things and flowers, easy. "And I wasn't the only one. All the girls in the class were crazy about Bill."

"Botany was just a bi-product for Bill. His job was scientific farming, and he was simply a cracker-jack. Awfully clever. He had light hair and he was tanned, and blue eyes—turquoise blue," she laughed and shot a glance at Nelson.

"Oh, if that's the reason," Nelson temporised.

"I'm afraid I liked turquoises even before I liked Bill," she laughed. "Bill had a way that simply finished me. He'd be awfully solemn for a long time, and talk botany, then all of a sudden he'd smile. He was like a big baby when he laughed. I was just mushy about him. And, I wore my hair in two long pig-tails—it's so

awfully heavy, you know—and the pig-tails did for Bill!”

“Of course Mama simply had fits. She said that, with my hair and eyes and skin—my creamy skin—*isn't* it all too silly?—I could shine anywhere, and she simply would not have me marry a clod-hopper farmer who'd have the spades and hoes in the parlor! He *was* like that,” Elsie laughed. “All rooms looked alike to Bill. Of course Mama simply drove us together, and we ran off for long walks in the woods, and sometimes we talked botany and sometimes we didn't. We were in love, and heady. At last, to keep us from eloping, or worse, we got a home wedding out of Mama. Papa liked Bill well enough, but he had no control over Mama. Nobody has. Not even Mama!”

“It wasn't too gay—that wedding. But we didn't know it, Bill and I. I guess if Mama'd let us be, and the war hadn't happened, and Papa hadn't made such oodles of money, Bill and I'd have got on alright. But Mama can't let anything be. She decided to make Bill over into a swell. But the family, except Papa, with its pockets full of hairpin money, its

social ladders, its little ideas about who to know and who not to know, simply made Bill sick. Then, slowly, he got *mad*. That was where I first got acquainted with Bill Raymond! He got mad slowly, but he got it for keeps. Bill's no fraud, and he'd got waked up to the sort of family circus we were."

"Then came the war, and Bill saw his chance and he took it. He chucked us all and came over here. He's still here." She was silent for a moment, her beautiful hand with its turquoise and diamond rings posed upon her vanity case, the smoke of her cigarette rising straight and fine in the still air, her glance turned from the young men, the hectic dancers, the lights and jazz, to the night in the still trees. "It's dollars to doughnuts he's looking for your blessed 'marble of Egypt,' and riding third-class too! I guess, from things I hear," she added wistfully, "that poor old Bill's been up against it."

"I was such a fool. I was hurt, black and blue. Mama was stubborn and mean. Papa was sorry for me, and awfully irritating. I got heady and pretended not to care. I *let* Bill go! I just froze up, inside the sulks. I

didn't thaw when he left. I couldn't. For a while I was paralyzed. After he'd gone I cried all the time. Papa got sick of it. But Mama stood pat. She knows a lot, Mama does. She knows that people get over things."

"Bill got wounded and was sent home for a short leave. We sort of patched things up—but everybody had changed. Everybody except Mama. Bill thought we should go into the war. I mean," she said, "he *knew* that it was up to us. He was simply fine when he talked about it! I can just hear him and the things he said. Mama didn't think so. That was once in her life when Mama didn't see something that was good for her. How they fought about it, Mama and Bill. I can just see him in our parlor, telling Mama where to get off. Then he came over again—everybody mad—even worse than the first time."

"Then we went in. In two years our hairpins had been turned into wire war-things of all sorts, and we were so rich we didn't know what to do with ourselves. Mama went absolutely nutty with joy. She went in for war babies, of course. She had to. But every three or four babies looked like a lost diamond to

her. Automobiles, a big new house, and clothes and diamonds. But people came to the house, and asked her and Papa to their houses, and that was all she cared about."

"When the war was over, Bill came back, but not to us. He went right out to the college. The little college was booming, like us. It had got a big endowment, new paint and a lot of new buildings, and a "get green quick" campus. He moped about. His job was filled of course, and the man was as good as Bill, and less of a nuisance. They'd outgrown him. Bill said so himself. I think that, maybe, Bill had outgrown his job. Anyway he and his old job couldn't seem to get together again. He'd changed while he was over here."

"Then I did the wrong thing," she sighed. "I'm quite a wonder at that, anyway. I wrote him a note and asked him to meet me in the grove where we'd met at first, to talk things over. I didn't want Mama to interfere. I drove out in my electric car, and I suppose I was rather dolled up, but I didn't think of his minding. It made him furious. He simply cussed me out. I cried at first, then I got mad too. After all, there is no crime in a quick little

car, a nice frock and my pig-tails pinned up. I don't wear diamonds to breakfast, the way Mama does."

"Then I got off my trolley. I put up my head and decided to show Bill a thing or two. I flirted outrageously with a little fool whose father had also hit it rich. A regular little house-pet. I drove him all over the place in my car, and in Mama's limousines. There wasn't any real harm in it," she paused as if to be sure, laughed oddly, and then went on, "but Bill didn't see it that way."

"One fatal night Bill came into our big new garden. I'd give a lot to know what made him come. But I suppose I never will know. It was too awful! He caught little Bobbie with his little arm round me. I'm such a big thing that I should think he'd have seen it was just silliness. But Bill was too mad to see. He took Bobbie up like a kitten, by the back of his neck, and he ducked him in our new fountain. I thought he was going to drown him, and I tried to help Bobbie. Bill put me aside like a nothing. Me! He took Bobbie by his collar and me by my sash, and marched us into the house. I hadn't a collar on, you

see. Far from it! Papa was sitting alone in his new library, reading the newspapers. Bill planted us there, and then went to find Mama. He just drove her in, my soft, little brother yapping at her heels. And then Bill stood there and actually told them just how he'd caught us. He was so mad he didn't know what he was doing. Really, I was just letting Bobbie kiss me, and thinking how little it mattered to me, and supposing that that was the way men as foolish as Bobbie felt about it when they kissed girls. But Bill didn't know that. Then my brother, to get even with me for a lot of things, took Bill's side. Old Papa sat still, his newspapers all over the floor around him, looking through the lot of us as if we were ghosts. Mama called Bill a savage, and worried about Bobbie's catching cold. Mama had little Bobbie all numbered for my second, I guess, and she didn't want him to die of pneumonia."

"Then all of a sudden, something happened inside my head. I simply got all lit up. I stood off, and ordered Bill and Bobbie out of the house, and told them to stay out. They went, and right away! I cleaned up my little brother and sent him up to bed, and told him to say his

prayers and to leave me out. I told Mama she was a fraud, and a silly, dressed-up, pathetic little old thing. Mama stood up for herself with a glance that ought to have killed me, then she walked out of the room with her hand on my little brother's arm. Then Papa and I locked the door and opened the windows, and we had a cry together and we wished we were poor again. Papa's a hick, if ever, but he's just as sweet as his clover," she laughed softly. "I'm going to bring Papa over to see Paris some day!"

After a moment's pause and the absent choosing of a fresh cigarette, Nelson holding the flame, Elsie took a deep breath and went on.

"Bill came back here; never stopped, I guess, till he got here. And now—I've got to find him. Not to bother him. I'm not that kind. But just to be sure he's alright. If he wants me to, I'll get a divorce. Then everybody can begin all over again."

"You know where he is?" asked Seymour, after a moment.

"My lawyer is finding him for me. Bill's not to know; not even if he's alright. I had

a sort of hope that some of you might have run across him? But I'm already getting onto the fact that Paris is a big proposition and all Americans don't—" She laughed and with a gesture, let it go at that.

"We are twenty-some thousand strong in Paris now," said Dunbar.

"If you want to call it strong," put in Nelson.

Seymour eyed his friend. "Yes," he stuck to it. "I call it strong."

"Nobody knows," Elsie confessed, looking from one to the other, lost in her thoughts of Bill, "how awfully I just want to *see* old Bill. I've got an address—" She opened a little gold-backed ivory tablet.

The three men looked curiously, Elsie holding the little tablet close to the pink shaded light.

"It's the other side of the town," said Dunbar.

"It's in what they call 'The Quarter,' isn't it?" asked Elsie.

Nelson sat back, shocked and amused to see their 'Arabian Night's' story fitting together. The address was in the street where he had

his studio. Would the plot 'thicken' he wondered, in a criss-crossing of paths, or would he and Bill Raymond live their problems within a stone's throw of one another, and never meet? "I know the quarter, even the street, rather well," he said, with an odd glance at Seymour.

It was growing late, people thinning out, auto-doors slamming, cars gliding up and taking their men and women away under the rose-flushed veil of the Paris night sky.

Elsie rose to go. This time she'd make the first move. Her rising made its stir.

"You've told us a wonderful story," said Nelson, while Dunbar and Seymour wrapped her light cape about her, and got her trinkets together. She was very handsome, and telling her story had moved her, had made her something more than handsome. "I've all but talked your three blessed heads off, haven't I?" she smiled.

"You have," agreed Nelson, "and a good thing it is, for we will all have to have another evening at once, so that you may talk them on again."

They stood in the bright light a moment

waiting for their taxi. "I'll tell you what," said Dunbar, "you must all dine with me, say on Tuesday night. Then Elsie, perhaps you'll have news of Raymond. You must let us big-brother you along, you know. I feel already as if it were up to us."

Elsie looked at him oddly. "Jo Dunbar, I believe you're less of a snob than you used to be!" she laughed into his eyes.

"But haven't you heard?" Nelson was very grave. "That's what the war was for; to take the snobbery out of Jo Dunbar!"

"I'm hearing a whole lot of things to-night," chuckled Elsie. She gave her hand to Seymour and Nelson, for they'd decided to walk home. Dunbar climbed into the taxi beside her. The two young men stood back, their hats in their hands, as the taxi started, everything looking, as Elsie thought, with a happy thrill, "just like a cover on 'Vanity Fair!'" The light from the restaurant fell brilliantly upon her silver-swathed head as she turned and smiled another good-night, over her shoulder.

The two young men walked down the Avenue du Bois, under the starry night. The warmth, the leaves and stars weighed down their words.

Their voices failed in all the leafiness, somehow, to carry. They walked, eyes wide open, hats in their hands, seeing little, feeling the night as it seemed to feel them, merged in the shadows till they felt little more substantial than the beautiful, spacious, deserted way appeared to be. "Dunbar's started something, eh?" yawned Nelson.

"Quite a beauty, eh?" said Seymour absently.

"Astounding," admitted Nelson. "The top-knotch of everything that's wrong. Our national black-eye on its first trip abroad. Frightening. And damned conspicuous. But promising. The most promising thing I've ever met in all my life." He yawned into the darkness and laughed at himself, at everything. A bewildered laugh in the leafy darkness.

"Promising?" Seymour peered at him.

"Promising what?"

"God knows, old top," said Nelson gravely.

Then Seymour met a girl he knew as they were crossing the Etoile, and Nelson went on home alone.

V

NELSON CONFESSES

"Awful hot—" complained Elsie, reddening her mouth and whitening her nose, while the men ordered the dinner. They were in a little room overlooking the Quais, at 'La Pérouse,' and the light was summer twilight, irritating and penetrating.

"Yes. Very," murmured Nelson.

Elsie considered him wistfully. "Cross?" she asked him.

"Yes. Very," he repeated.

"We're off!" chuckled Dunbar, looking at the two of them.

"We are not," said Nelson, then turning to Elsie with the quick smile that always won her, "have you found Mr. Raymond?" he asked her.

"Mr. Raymond!" she mimicked him.

"You might let the poor girl have her dinner before you begin your asking," said Seymour.

"You know, old man," added Dunbar, "our Elsie's no willing slave. Look out or she'll leave us for Deauville! Be awful here, without her, in this heat. Serve *you* right, I must say."

Elsie smiled good-naturedly. "Yes, I have found him," she told Nelson. "and he's all right."

"Quick work," commented Dunbar.

"Bill wasn't *hiding*," said Elsie with a flare of unreasonable indignation.

"Who said he was?" Dunbar patted her hand. "Don't *you* go and be cross now. You're the light of our lives. Seymour's and mine, anyway."

"He's in Paris?" Nelson asked, ignoring personal diversions.

Elsie nodded. "He got back, but he was all but broke, poor Bill! He took some sort of an office job. He had to, to get by. And he found his girl again,—his war girl. I've got no kick coming about his having a girl. I was just a fool. I—still am," she laughed unsteadily. "The girl's a good sort. I hear she cooks

and darns for him, and all. They were awfully poor, I guess. I drove by the place where they lived. *A hole!*”

“If,” said Nelson, dryly, “you live long enough, you may come to realize that important human beings are living in “holes” of that sort. People it will be to your advantage to know. If they have time——”

“Third class holes all lined with wonderful Egyptian marble, eh? You’re jumpy to-night, it seems to me,” remarked Elsie, nibbling her hors d’oeuvres and sipping the delicious white-gold wine.

Nelson flushed and ran his hands over his smoothly brushed wavy brown hair. “You must pardon me,” he said, more frankly than penitently. “The night is rather—jumpy, isn’t it?”

Elsie looked at him gravely. “It is,” she agreed. “But you’d better get hold of yourself right now, for I’m on the edge of being jumpy, too. There’s an awful lot of me, when I am jumpy.”

Nelson murmured something inaudible.

Elsie laughed at him, then half turned away from him to the others. “It seems that, one day at the office, one jumpy day,” she paused

to glance at Nelson, "poor old Bill got mad over some finniky thing in his job, and all but pulled the roof down. He gets smothered like that in the house. He got fired. He was down and out, but the girl stuck to him. I guess she must be a good sort. Then," she looked at them questioningly, "Bill ran across a man named Cosgrieve. Did any of you ever hear of him?"

"John Cosgrieve?" asked Dunbar.

Elsie nodded. "That's his name. My lawyer tells me that Bill is lucky, that Cosgrieve is the best ever?"

"One of 'em, anyway," Dunbar conceded.

"He's awfully rich?" she asked.

"Yes my dear. I venture to say he could buy you out to-night, and on his way home, buy a steamship, and forget to add you in," said Dunbar.

"He's beat me to it with Bill," she confessed. "Well, anyhow, money's the thing. For all Bill's high and mighty scorn, it took somebody's money to save him. I guess," she said shrewdly, "other money than mine looks different to Bill. Maybe it's the hairpins. It's

the devil, money, eh? Hairpin money, anyway."

"Oh come, come," said Nelson quite gently. "It's only the devil when you haven't got it. One hates a motor-car when one stands in the street and takes the dust."

"Come along with the story," urged Dunbar. "I don't mind owning that Cosgrieve's about my ideal, and from what you say of Raymond, they ought to hit it off."

"I don't mean that Bill isn't earning his money," Elsie said eagerly. "He wouldn't just take anybody's money. Not Bill."

"You know," Seymour bent across the table, his dark face alight, "I've got so keen to have Raymond make good, from all you've said about him that I'd feel as if I'd failed myself if things went wrong. Some pretty fine chaps have zigzagged over here since the war, you know. Just sunk down, tired, and willing to live it out on next to nothing. Of course a failure's a failure, or a fool's a fool just the same as ever, but one's got a new feeling about it, somehow. Sort of responsible, every fellow for the other fellow, sort of thing. Maybe it's

patriotism. Funny thing, patriotism. Awful when it's cheap, but—!"

"Cheap?" queried Elsie. "You mean when people wear flags?"

"Lordy," laughed Seymour who was not a talker, "I don't know what I mean. Ask Nelson!"

"I had lunch with Mr. Cosgrieve to-day," said Elsie casually, munching olives, watching for her effect.

"The dickens you did," said Dunbar. "You fraud—!"

She nodded, her eyes laughing. "You see, Cosgrieve met Papa on a big wire deal. They were in charge of something together. Of course he liked Papa, so he wants to be good to me. It's funny—just like a sort of a fate—Cosgrieve and Bill getting together. You see, Cosgrieve has bought a place over here; miles of land, and a castle or two. He's putting bath-tubs into his castles, and wants to cultivate his land. That's where Bill gets in!"

"Well, that is quite beautiful," said Nelson absently. "Plot within plot."

"It's lucky anyway," she said, watching Nelson absently. "Cosgrieve tells me he bought

the place for a song, but I guess it was more like an opera-score, eh? The long and short of it is that Bill's gone down there, the girl along, to oversee the place. As Cosgrieve says, or as Bill says, to make it bloom. He took them down in his car to see the place first. Bill wouldn't budge without the girl. Her name's Denise. He said they sat together on the back seat, both looking city-pale, and never talking a word all the way. But he said when Bill got inside the property and began seeing what could be done with it, he simply went crazy. They are down there now—living. Cosgrieve gave them a house. There are stables too, and Cosgrieve has some horses, and he says Bill just lives on horse-back. I've simply got to see him, and then—"

"Then—what?" Nelson shot her a kindly but keen glance.

"Oh—" she gestured, the light bright on her rings, "I'll fade out! Like any old blonde girl-in-the-movies!"

"Fade out? You?" Dunbar laughed and patted her hands. "You'll buy a new hat and get engaged to one of us. Any one you like!"

"Not if I see you first," said Elsie. "I

mean," she went on, "that I'll 'fade out' as far as Bill is concerned. A divorce 'll be the best way, then he can marry his girl and get square with himself."

"Be sure first that he wants to marry her, my dear," said Dunbar.

Elsie observed him. "Funny. That's what Mr. Cosgrieve said, too. But, Bill's crazy about her? I guess I'm a hick all right." Her words faltered and the light showed the brightness of tears across her eyes. "I've made up my silly mind," she said, "to come over here bag and baggage, and stay till I've got my eyes open. It's going to be very hard going, but I'm going to do it. I'm going home to pack up my past and bury it. Then I'm coming back. And you just watch me!"

"Shall you come back third-class?" asked Nelson smiling into her eyes.

Elsie turned fully and met his cynical eyes. "No," she told him. "My past was third-class, thank you. I've had enough of it. When you've really had it, you're not so crazy about it."

"I beg your pardon," said Nelson. "I really quite love you, Mrs. Raymond, when you hit

back. You do it—beautifully. And sometimes you take me much too seriously.”

Seymour broke in, impatient with Nelson’s eternal sharp-edged lightness. His heavy young face was dark with eager confession. “You can’t realize what a serious thing it is—coming over here to stay. Better think twice before you burn your home bridges.”

“Twice?” sighed Elsie. “I think about it all the time!”

Seymour kept at the subject, bound to make Elsie listen to him. “It’s rotten being homesick. Be worse for you than for us; you with nothing to do. You don’t realize. You can’t. You’re just a tourist. You wait till you’re lonesome someday—”

“But I *am* lonesome, all the time; right now even,” said Elsie so gravely, that they failed to even smile.

“It depends upon what you want,” said Nelson. “It’s serious, damned serious, being transplanted. And you,” he laughed holding her glance, “back in your beautiful head, with all your money, want, as sure as fate, out of Paris, just what your mother wanted in her little town. Isn’t that so?”

The angry color surged over Elsie's face. "It is not so," she gave it back to him. "I want," she gestured as if she were smothering, "to be free. To get away from all of that. Honestly I do! It's my chance. Why, I can go all over the place here, all day and all night long, and not a blessed soul whispers 'hairpins.'" I want to get an apartment, and keep a house in my own way. And to have friends. And maybe—" she smiled suddenly, and very sweetly, and she looked fully into Nelson's eyes, daring to be wholly frank, "maybe I'll find out what's the matter with turquoise blue, and learn how to behave myself!"

"You are a *dear!*" said Seymour with his warm brown-eyed smile.

"You are indeed," sighed Nelson.

"I'm not, I am not!" said Elsie, "but I do just dreadfully want to be! If you knew how I get red, alone in the dark, over the breaks I make!"

Nelson watched her thoughtfully. "You are a precious problem, aren't you? A very social problem, eh?"

"Chuck it, Nel'," said Seymour flushing. "What's the matter with you anyway?"

For a longish minute the two young men looked at one another. Then Nelson said, "I'm simply a damn fool, Seymour. What's the matter with *you*?"

"Now," said Elsie comically, "everybody's jumpy except Jo Dunbar!"

"I'm saving up for my food. My eye," he whispered boyishly as the door opened and the actor-faced waiter bowed himself in and presented a steaming plate. "And people hunt round for reasons for living over here! Look at that bird, the sauce, the crockery!" But the others cross like big children, ate for a while without talking. Nelson was very silent, and the others chatted after a while letting him be; chatted casually, the perfect food bringing them back to well-being.

All through the dinner Nelson was irritable, restless. He laughed at Elsie, threw the light up on her, and put her in the wrong until protest from Dunbar and Seymour went close to anger. And then, as usual, Elsie sided with Nelson and called herself "too many pounds of hick." That seemed a bit thick to her defenders, and the dinner did not go too well. Nelson sat by the window and between the

dessert and coffee he played with the leaves of a note-book. It was a battered old note-book, full of loose, odd ends of paper. He was abstracted, not aware of the irritation all about him. "Got some letters to write?" Elsie asked him flippantly.

"You know," he said rising and looking at her vaguely, then less vaguely at Seymour, "I'm tired, damn tired. If you don't mind, I'm going to toddle along. I'm smothering in here. I'll walk a while, then turn in." He looked again at Elsie. "Seymour will tell you what a wreck I am sometimes, if you don't believe me. Ask him. Good-night." And he went, as if they were all forgotten even before he'd got outside the door. Then they saw him below, crossing the street. He stood a while by the river wall; then they saw him walk slowly away, his hat in his hand, toward the Boulevard St. Michel.

Elsie, distressed, observed her reduced forces. "Did I—rough-house?—or say something too awful?"

"No, no," said Seymour, "I 'd tell you something to make you understand Nelson better, if I hadn't given my word. But it's the very

truth, he's "tired, damn tired." He got badly bashed up in the war and he's not as hard-shelled as the rest of us, to begin with. You mustn't mind anything he does, or says. I forget it myself sometimes. He's irritating. I'm sorry I got mad at him to-night. Why do you let him talk to you as he sometimes does?"

Elsie thought it over, then looked at Seymour with her amazing frankness. "He makes me so mad sometimes that I want to just kill him, but, you know, I don't believe he'd bother saying all those horrid things to me if he didn't like me, would he?"

Dunbar chuckled, and Seymour smiled at Elsie.

"What have you got up your sleeve about Nelson, old man?" Dunbar asked. "Is our perfect darling leading a double life?"

"Double?" Seymour thought it over. "He's leading ten lives, poor devil."

Elsie looked at Seymour and thought of Nelson. She smoked, wondering what sort of a double life they meant. She sat back from the table a little, wondering if she dared ask. The air was heavy; great piles of clouds were banking up behind the sycamore trees

along the river. All the noises in the street seemed to double, as they do before a storm. She fanned herself with the printed souvenir-fan the waiter had given her. She dropped the fan and stooped to pick it up. And there on the floor at her feet lay a leaf of paper, written over in a small stubby hand. She stooped again, but Seymour's hand touched the paper first. "Sketch for play in three scenes." was written at the top, and underneath that, a title "Friends, or Something." Elsie had read that much before Seymour picked up the paper. "Nelson must have dropped the thing," he said, folding it up. "I'll give it to him."

"Nelson?" Elsie looked wonderingly at Seymour. "Is it his writing?"

"Yes, it is," said Seymour, shortly.

"It said, 'Sketch for a play,' " she insisted. "It can't be his—"

"Can't it?" smiled Seymour.

"One of those ten lives you just mentioned cropping up?" laughed Dunbar. Nothing either interested or troubled Dunbar at the moment of coffee after a really good dinner, and he spoke without thinking.

Brusquely the door opened, and Nelson him-

self came in. He glanced over the table and saw him paper in Seymour's hand. "I dropped that paper, under the table I suppose? Thanks, Seymour—" He put his hand out to take it, but suddenly he relaxed, sat in the chair by Elsie, looked from one to the other of his astonished friends, and the paper on the table before him, and laughed. It was not a mirth-inspiring laugh, and the three faces went on watching him. "God," he whispered at last, "What an egotistical ass I am! Making a fool secret of things like that. Read it if you like. Read it aloud. Rub it in. One of you can sit on me to make me stay and listen!"

"I'm damned glad it happened, old man," said Seymour, ringing and ordering a coffee and cognac for Nelson. "Brace up, then read it to us yourself. Why not?"

"You—write things? Plays? Really?" Elsie asked timidly, unbelievably.

Nelson looked at her, flushed and said, "What of it? It's a job, like another. A very exigent job, too. That thing—anything a man writes, in that stage, may be just dribble. That's why I was so upset over your possibly finding it. Mere vanity, eh?" He smiled,

looking out of the window at the trees along the river. "You know," he turned to Elsie, "I'll confess something else. I've a studio, a "hole" as you call such places, in the same street and all but next door to the other hole where your Raymond lived."

"Oh, that's too *wierd!*" Elsie looked and looked at Nelson. "You know," she sighed, "I never met a-n'author before! Will you really read it to us?"

Her voice made Nelson flush. "You make me ashamed of myself," he said. "I'm not worth it. The thing is nothing. Just an idea. I'll give you other things to read. Read it, if you like. I noted it down while waiting for you here, and I left you to go to a café down the river and write it—. Go ahead—read it! Read it twice, and rub it in. I'll read it to you. There's only one person on earth that I've ever read stuff too, but she's—different. It will be good for my silly, secretive soul to have to read the thing to you!"

"I s'pose," said Elsie absently, "that she is a person who knows a lot?"

"Yes," Nelson smiled. "And what she does

not know she understands." Then, after a pause that forbade more talk of her, he read his sketch to them.

SKETCH FOR A PLAY

Two simple, everyday good people, a man and a woman, are working side by side at the same job, something dull and clerical. They two love two wonderful and gifted people whom they support and give liberty to express themselves in unrenumerative poems and pictures. Over their work they confess and boast of their precious burdens, their priceless treasures, their two geniuses above earning. They build a dream upon their hard, common work to comfort it. They will get together, one night, with their starry-eyed treasures, and will make a feast. Week by week they lay aside a sum to pay for the feast. Everyone is to be glad, to eat a great deal, to drink ever so little too much, their precious ones to speak wonderfully, to make them proud; to make them all laugh with happiness, like four children playing together.

—Scene Two—

The feast—the starry-eyed two are brought together by their proud and eager toilers. Too eager. The meeting for the precious two is, for them, revelation. It is a crossways at a crest, the thing they've been watching for, the reason for having endured the supporting of their clumsiness and irritating toilers. They sit side by side, treat their slaves as kings and queens treat their servants. Their hands touch, they speak in words the others do not know, their eyes say the rest. The slaves sit at the foot of the table, dull, heavy, helpless, hurt. Left out. And in the dead of night, the two starry-eyed ones leave them, give them patient smiles for recompense, set out hand in hand, to take their eyes out to the stars for mingling of light—of eye-light and star-light.

—Scene Three—

The merciless morning sun finds the two slaves, huddled close, faces lined with tired sleeplessness, an apathetic waiter handing them the bill for the feast. They look at it, reckon it, pay it, an identical wistfulness upon their two toilworn faces. They rise, steadying themselves, with their lumpy fistled hands upon the

disordered table. They look at the disorder: emptied dishes, crumpled linen. They go out to their day's work. They have never, in all the scene, looked at one another.

"You see," smiled Nelson, fitting his sketch back into the rings of his notebook, "what a scrap of paper it is to have made all the fuss about?"

"Oh—" said Elsie, looking at Nelson, but not listening to him, "I can just *see* them. It's like pictures—"

Nelson's long thin face was glistening white. "Thank you," he said. "That's what I wanted you to do."

"Oh my goodness," she breathed softly. Words, even Elsie's words, forsook her. She held her hands together in her lap, and she sat back against her chair like some big sweet soft thing against a board. Then suddenly she laughed, really happily, as if she's discovered something she wanted, had been hunting for. "*That's* why you are sometimes so—wonderful, and sometimes so—mean, eh?"

"Well, old man," said Dunbar, "if I weren't

shock proof, I simply couldn't stand it. Had any success with the writing? I mean—"

"I've sold some things," Nelson looked at him, smiling faintly, "If that's what you mean by success?"

"'Fraid it is," laughed Dunbar, "What's your idea, old man? Why—two jobs? Serious—about the writing—?"

Nelson mused. "I'm still in the Bank," he murmured, "And I haven't yet pleased myself, out of it."

And then the light outside yellowed, and the black clouds came on with a rush. It poured. Torrents of rain, till the leaves flew and fell, the streets ran, and the air was filled with the pungency of wet dust, wet earth. The drops drummed and splattered and drowned out other sounds. The four friends looked out while the air cooled off. And when the storm had passed, the twilight had gone with it and the summer night was there, lovely and refreshing, stars laughing far off, farther off than mere storms. And the four smiled at one another, new friends and better, for confession and the summer rain.

VI

BATIK

IT was late afternoon, and late June. Sunlight, like golden mist, was spraying over Paris. Even the shadows were warm, and glowing in reckless, truth-telling light. A taxi stopped before Fouquet's, and Elsie and her three young men climbed out. They'd been to the races, and were tired and thirsty. They dined together now, night after night, and Elsie ruled it—and she could be invincible—their dinners were "Dutch." It added a note of vagabondage, gaiety, freedom of speech.

"I'm not coming to your Sunday dinner this week," she told Seymour, over her porto blanc.

"But why on earth not?" he demanded. "Why should we *have* a dinner without you?"

Elsie blushed but stuck to it. Chatham was

always there, with his girl, and last Sunday night there had been another girl, and more obvious. It hurt her feelings, and for that very reason it had been hard for her to say so. They thought her—Dunbar and Seymour, and perhaps Nelson—a “good sport;” thought she understood, or didn’t care, didn’t notice. The girls behaved well enough, drank and laughed much less than she did, but Elsie had her air-castle, and just now, she had no women friends to walk its rooms and gardens with her. She saw a space, and interval of darkness, between her hectic present and the castle of her dreams. These men all had mothers and sisters and cousins, in and out of Paris, too. Why did she never meet them? “I’m not crazy about Mr. Chatham and his—friends,” she blushed.

“You are perfectly right not to come, Mrs. Raymond,” said Nelson as sympathetically as she could have asked.

She gave him a grateful smile.

“But, what’s the idea?” protested Dunbar. “Those girls—! Elsie wanted to see a bit of life.”

Elsie laughed at him with courage backed by Nelson’s sympathy. “The trouble with you,

Jo Dunbar, is that you haven't got a feeling to your name. And the trouble with me is that I've got too many."

"Oh Elsie darling!" Dunbar pretended to be enormously hurt. "How can you, when you know how I love you!"

"Yes," she said, "I know just how!"

Nelson shifted his long, grey-flannelled legs, and his face worked faintly with the disapproval she always sensed from him when she'd been crude—too frank—had liked or said wrong things.

"Why Joey Dunbar!" came a high thin voice. "I must at least speak to you!" The three men rose as an oldish woman dressed in mole and citron yellow batik came from the wide walk, under the awning, to greet Dunbar. She took Dunbar's hand in both her own, and her loose sleeves fell back, showing ivory bracelets that clattered softly up and down her thin arms. Her hands were small, and were still very lovely. She wore pretty mole-coloured shoes and stockings. She was sweet and odd, and likeable. "Now, Joey dear, I *must* write your mother about meeting you, if I ever do write." She laughed into his eyes, her face

crinkling with fine little wrinkles. Then, over the high bridge of her fine nose she gave Elsie a keen scrutiny.

Dunbar presented "Miss Hope," and tucked her, protesting but delighted, into a chair between himself and Seymour. "You *are* American, aren't you, Miss Raymond? You are so blonde, you know, I thought you were English, at least until I really looked."

Elsie looked oddly irritated. "I am *Mrs.* Raymond, and I am one hundred per cent. American," she answered.

Miss Hope, for an instant, lifted her lorgnette, paused, then turned fully to Dunbar, as if Elsie's answer had been, not only full, but perhaps superfluous.

Nelson, faintly smiling, diverted Elsie with a fresh cigarette, which he put into her little amber holder for her. He offered one to Miss Hope, who, to Elsie's wonder, accepted it, and smoked as if she'd been smoking all her life. "And a long life!" Elsie thought to herself, not at all sweetly.

"It's too lovely, dear boy, meeting you like this," Miss Hope's eyes crinkled. "This time I'll easily remember to write to your mother."

"I should *hope* so!" Dunbar crinkled back boyishly.

"Now Joey," she shrieked softly, "it isn't nice of you, rubbing it in about my new name!"

"But," Dunbar put back his hat and laughed into her eyes, "You know I wouldn't!"

"I know you would, you dear!" declared Miss Hope. "Thank you, a café-crème, please." Then she turned suddenly to Elsie, becoming wholly amiable. "Mrs. Raymond, I appeal to you. An old, old maid, who has a *job*, you know, (I make batik) has a right has she not, to henna her hair and take a new name that goes with her job? Do defend me!"

"Why not?" said Elsie. She could think of nothing else to say.

Miss Hope's glance poised slantwise on Elsie's diamond rings. Her eyes, like blue moons, turned from Seymour to Nelson, and fixed at last upon Nelson who smiled back at her. "You know what our James Russell Lowell said, in his essay on Keats? 'You cannot say a thing is *Keatsey*. Fate likes fine names.' My poor name was Hubb. Sarah Hubb. Now, it is Sally Hope." She gave a comical sigh.

"To have said one of my batiks was *Hubby*. Hope is better for a job name, isn't it?"

"It's altogether a splendid name," said Nelson, clearly delighting in her, wholly turned to her.

Elsie stared at Nelson and gave it up. Could he really like the frumpy, cracked old rag—? She looked again, thinking of the empty rooms of her air-castle. Their dreamed-of furniture fitted badly with Sally Hope and her lemon-yellow batiks. And Nelson seemed to like her. The silly, frumpy little thing! "Some life," sighed Elsie to herself.

"*You* were lucky," Miss Hope beamed upon Elsie. "Some nice person changed yours for you, though no doubt your own was sweet enough to start with."

"It wasn't bad," said Elsie, then in spite of herself she added, "Not as bad as Hubb." Nelson glanced at Elsie, and by his lifted brows, she told herself, made her feel "as if she'd slapped a baby." "Hope's a n'awfully pretty name, anyway," she added, and blushed.

Nelson ignored her, Dunbar seemed amused, and Seymour seemed unaware. Miss Hope played with her washable yellow gauntlets.

"How does one change one's name?" queried Nelson. "Isn't it an endless bother?"

"Yes," Miss Hope laughed, "but desperation carried me through. I went to a woman, you know?—one of those persons who reduce one to a chart, then make a sum of one's facts and one's luck, add one up, then convert the answer into letters, and there one is! You know," she wailed plaintively, "one simply could *not* go on signing batiks with *Sarah Hubb*, though I know it does seem a silly thing to have done. Then new passports and papers! It was really a dreadful nuisance."

Miss Hope wore several rings upon her very slender old fingers. They were old rings, rich and soft-looking and they puzzled Elsie and made her look with new doubt at the two enormous solitaires she herself was wearing. Headlights they were, and they'd cost her a pretty penny.

"I'd not have the courage to do it again," Miss Hope laughed. "I felt like a criminal, hiding something."

"You should have told *me*," chuckled Dunbar. "We could have got married and divorced. Dunbar's a lovely name, *I* think!"

Miss Hope beamed upon him. "I should have thought of that, Joey, but I didn't!"

"I see," said Dunbar, "that you are still collecting rings?"

"Oh yes," she said estatically, "I do so love my rings. I bought this one yesterday—isn't it too lovely?" She slipped a ring off her finger and laid it on the table before them.

Nelson picked it up and bent towards Elsie with it, the late afternoon sun catching upon the old square-cut emeralds and soft pearls. "It is very beautiful," he said, laying it before Elsie as if it were, for her, an opportunity.

Elsie picked it up, her great platinum-set solitaires flashing. With the common but irresistible humor of her sort she laid the ring down, turned her own blazing stones into her palms, then picked the delicate thing up again. "Now," she laughed, "maybe I can see it."

They all laughed with her, then bent over the ring, while Miss Hope, who knew about old rings, pointed out the values, its hand-worked, tender old gold, its beautiful detail. "I do so hate platinum and all of its hard, white, safe perfections," she said. "You must forgive me, Mrs. Raymond, but when I think of the lovely

things you could have for one of those big diamonds of yours, and how beautiful you'd be in them, I could cry! Of course," she smiled sunnily, "diamonds are an investment. But I can just see you with old, old pearls, and that golden hair of yours!"

Elsie, her eyes fixed upon the little ring, upon Miss Hope's finger again, sat with her hands in her lap, and sighed. It was a sigh that her kindness could only ignore. Except Nelson. His exasperating smile played from the lovely ring to Elsie's hands and seemed to catch her sigh in mid-air, to torture it, to confess aloud its meaning.

"Do you still paint?" Dunbar asked Miss Hope, to change the drift.

"Oh yes," she breathed, "and the same funny little 'old hat' sketches I always did. They used to be thought clever. But now, they look—oh dear! Not that it matters how they look! I paint abominably, as anybody'd know I would do," she smiled. "But I love it almost as much as my rings. Do you like painting, Mrs. Raymond?"

Elsie saved herself with desperate frankness.

"I don't know one blessed thing about it," she said.

"Oh?" Miss Hope was thoughtful. Then she turned the drift. She was a disillusioned woman, and with a sigh and a smile, she let the useless details pass. "What a dear, crazy world it is!" she smiled maternally. She passed her hand, gleaming with its fine old relics, across her eyes, to break the mesmerism of the glare. "Yes, Joey," she said softly, "I'll remember, now, to write to your dear mother; to tell her of meeting you." She laid her hand gently upon his and looked at his wrist-watch.

"I shall beat you to it," said Dunbar squeezing her hand. "I shall write to her myself."

"Oh do, Joey, then I won't have to," she laughed, rising. The young men rose and stood about her. She loved it all, the gay place, their young homage. One could see how she loved it. "I'm dining with an old friend up near the Etoile. *She* really paints. I dine with her every Sunday night. I came early to have a walk. I'm awfully glad that I did." She gave them separate and collective gratitude out of her sweet eyes and beaming little old hands.

"We're all glad," said Elsie, melting all at once.

"Are you, my dear? Then perhaps we'll meet again. And do, do, for your own sake, collect old pearls!" She half closed her eyes and considered Elsie as if she were painting her. "Long, very long, old Spanish earrings, you know, and big crusted rings. You'd be lovely!" Then again to Dunbar. "I'll write your mother, perhaps, Joey. Good-bye, my dears—"

They sat again, watching her go—Sarah Hubb—Sally Hope, little and oldish, and all sweet and brave. The slanting sun caught upon the edges of her henna-dyed much waved hair, upon the flying points of her sash-ends and her lemon and mole coloured batiks.

"She made me feel like thirty cents," said Elsie, turning her solitaires out again and smiling at them.

"You don't look it, darling," chuckled Dunbar, "and bless you, you are pure gold!"

"Come, come, Dunbar," said Nelson acidly, "where are your manners. Mrs. Raymond is only interested in becoming pure platinum."

Elsie gave him a flash of temper. "Rub it

in," she murmured and turned stubbornly to her powder and lip-stick.

Nelson smoked. Dunbar settled with the waiter. Elsie, her powder puff in one hand, her little mirror in the other, paused and looked them over. "Call a taxi—Joey!" she mocked him, imitating Miss Hope. "I must go to my hotel and eat, drink and be merry all alone, for tomorrow I am going out to see Bill Raymond, and I shall probably die! You can drink me a silent toast," she went on with her powdering, "while you are being merry with Chatham and his street-rags. Why didn't you ask your Miss Hope to come and have dinner with you, Joey? You'd never think of asking *her*, would you?"

Nelson watched Elsie. Dunbar and Seymour exchanged a shocked glance. An awakening glance. "Miss Hope's awfully nice," said Dunbar, talking fast. "We'll have her to dine some night next week, if you will, Elsie?"

"You dining alone, too?" Elsie asked Nelson, ignoring the others.

"I?—Oh, I don't know. Alone—if at all. Why?"

Elsie laughed. "I just wondered. I like to guess how you three act at your Sunday dinners,

when I am not there. It's fun, guessing. I can see Jo, like a shot." She glanced at Seymour and said nothing. "But, you—" she laughed again at Nelson, "are sort of hard to guess."

"Why—thanks," murmured Nelson.

"Don't *speak* of it!" said Elsie comically.

Then in their taxi, they rolled away, leaving Nelson, hat in hand, looking idly after them. He had said he wanted to walk. Dunbar and Seymour were taking Elsie down to her hotel. She refused absolutely to come with them to dine. "That's that, and that is over," she told them. Dunbar leaned against her carelessly, and Seymour sat before her. "Oh," she said impatiently, her rings flashing as she beat the air, "do for heaven's sake sit over, both of you, and let me be. I feel like screaming!"

They laughed, pretended terror of her, lighted their cigarettes, and let her be. They chatted quite contentedly of people she had never heard of. She thought of Nelson and his fine-edged insolence. She visioned Bill. She felt tears swelling in her throat. She thought of the frumpy Miss Hope and her old junky rings. They hadn't really cost anything, comparatively. She stared

miserably at her solitaires—her pure, priceless, white diamonds. And now, the people she liked all sat around having fits about colour! She stared at her day's collection of blunders, her own so easily stirred irritation. None of these things, she told herself with her common sense, amounted to a "hill of beans." But—they did! They simply broke her heart. These blunders and little things! And she did so like playing round with Dunbar and Seymour. And Nelson too. But what did she really matter to them? To them she was "fair game," with all her diamonds, and clothes, and hicky blunders. They liked to go about with her because people stared at her, because they could say what they pleased to her, could talk over her head if they felt like it. She told herself that she was a fool to care; that it wasn't "good enough." But she did care. She cared so much that she was all nerves and ready to cry about it. She sat looking away from them, but wishing they'd notice her, understand her. They were talking about English politics. She thought of Nelson. Then of Cosgrieve. She liked Cosgrieve more than the others, except Nelson. Thinking of Cosgrieve

made her realize, with a leap of her warm heart, her approaching tomorrow, and Bill. Bill Raymond. And thinking of Bill she forgot the others, mercy giving her memory precious little every-day things, that had not been awkward to think of. Little things and their infinite consolations. But they were memories, and they would never happen again. She got thankfully away from the two young men, into the hotel, the lift, her room. She locked her door. Then, later, she unlocked it, and ordered her dinner in her room.

VII

TURQUOISES OF TEXAS

"HELLO—who is it?" said Elsie, at her bedroom telephone. She was kneeling in bed, holding the phone.

"Oh—? Fine, thanks."

"Yes. Lovely! The others are coming of course."

"No?—really?"

"Sure, I'll be ready! Goodbye!"

She put the phone back on the table and sat in the middle of her luxurious bed, a queer look, half sick and half triumphant, upon her face. Nelson had asked her to dine, alone. He'd said, in so many words, that he wanted her all to himself for once. She liked his wanting her to himself but she did not like herself for liking it. Nelson behaved like an animal trainer with

her. He lashed her with his sarcasm, made fun of her, made her feel awkward and green, made fun of her clothes, and her diamonds and turquoises. Why, why shouldn't she like turquoises? Lovely sky blue—She looked out at the sky and thought of her turquoises. They *weren't* quite the same sort of blue? But maybe he was just—the thought evaded her.

She got out of bed, the pink satin eiderdown following her, trailing after her crushed pink crepe de chine and ribbons. She laughed softly, liking all the warm softness of her things, herself, her bed. She sat a moment, one foot upon the other, both posed upon her pink satin mules. Bill was her persistent vision, and he had his enormous way of shutting out all the rest of the light. Cosgrieve had again put off their going down to see Bill, and he had invited Jo Dunbar to go with them. Cosgrieve had such a funny way of liking to be alone with her in a restaurant, or anywhere in a crowd, but not really alone. He seemed embarrassed, afraid of something, his shadow or hers, when chance threw them really alone together. She laughed to think of it. "Men!" she yawned, and stood and stretched herself, her hands rubbing her

lazy arms to life. Then with a laugh at the sunshine she said another word—"Geese!" She went to her dressing-table. She shook her braids loose, the light fairly leaping over her blond, glossy hair. The table with its triple glasses stood against a window that let the light of the high skies in upon her. She looked and looked at herself. The air from an open window moved over her deliciously. She stood close to the curtains and looked out, through the lace, over her mirror, at the Place de la Concorde, with its beautiful motor-cars moving every way, carrying men to their business, women to their shopping. Nelson had told her to profit while there in those windows; "to consider the roof-line across the river before her, as she had been taught to consider the lilies, and not to think at all of Lanvin or of Poiret." She'd "considered," and she'd laughed to think "what Papa'd think" of all the little funny chimney-pots. Of course Papa'd like the Chamber of Deputies, and the trees; but Nelson had said "roofs," and he usually meant what he said. She yawned again. What to do with her day? In the evening there was Nelson—they were to go to the *Rotonde* to dine—the

student's haunt. She felt a little afraid of that—didn't know just what to wear. Alone with Nelson? It was rank treason to Seymour and Jo Dunbar. But, they'd not really care. She wondered what they did, each and everyone of them, really care about? And why had Nelson laughed at her for coming to this hotel? When he'd asked her where she was stopping, he'd asked her "Why?" with that queer smile he had, his whole face like a shining knife. She'd told him that she 'guessed if it was good enough for Pershing, and Mary and Doug,' that it would do for her!" Brr-r-r-r-r-r-. The telephone again!

"Yes, hello—Oh, how *nice*!"

"Love to. One o'clock?"

"Yes—I promise!"

"Thanks—yes—Goodbye!"

Again she stood smiling, the odd sick look again giving the lie to her smile. Cosgrieve, this time! She was to lunch with him, alone! She wondered about Cosgrieve. She could have asked Dunbar about him. But she always forgot to, or put it off. "No news is good news." She smiled, accusing herself. He seemed married. Thinking that made her won-

der if she "seemed married." Perhaps his mother, maybe sisters, were living out there. Perhaps his wife was there. She'd find out when she went down to see Bill.

It was only a quarter to ten. She yawned and looked at her bed again. She got her book, —Old Court Life in France. She'd actually *cried* over the story of Louise de la Vallière. A prig, too! It was a funny idea, coming from her little old home town all the way to Paris, and then spending precious time crying over the life of a weak-kneed prig, and the rest of the time grouching because she was not meeting mothers and sisters, and cousins and aunts! She asked herself what on earth was the matter with her? She was having a great time. "A great time!" But, *was* she? She stood, splendid in the golden morning light, staring at the bunch of orchids that Cosgrieve had sent to her the day before. And that, with irony, flashed her mind back to Bill and his botany. Bill, and his love of the very weeds! Cosgrieve had probably ordered the orchids by 'phone, and his secretary would pay the bill. To-day, he'd forgotten probably that he'd sent them.

She slipped back into her bed. She lay flat,

her thoughts drifting about, her finger in her book to keep the place. She'd ask Nelson what he thought about the poor little prig, de Vallière. It would show that she was reading; would give her something to talk about, alone with him. She sat up brusquely, peering at herself in the mirror of her big wardrobe, and she flushed scarlet, and again she called herself "a fool." That made her feel better, for she'd more than half meant it. Down in the soft pillows again she stared at the dazzling light, and her thoughts played with her dreams. Even from her unsatisfactory vantage so far, she'd glimpsed the beautiful Paris game of life. She wanted to play too. She had the money, the looks. Elsie knew what she looked like, and she was beginning to suspect that she might look better. If she just knew how! She grew stubborn, thinking of Miss Hope's old rings, and what she'd said of her, in pearls. Old pearls, not new ones, all matched, but old pearls and all colors. And she made up her mind, there in bed, the room alive with morning sunshine, to play the game and to play it high. She'd do it even if she had to wear cracked and yellowed old Spanish pearls. And she wondered, all at

once, sharp as a revelation, what Miss Hope would say about her turquoises! Silly as it all was, the big, soft, golden, rich young thing lay there in her deep silky bed crying about the silliness, and lonesome, and wanting friends—mothers and sisters, and just “good times.” And, she cried it out for the time, then she drifted to sleep again; slept like a big handsome baby till after eleven o’clock.

She dressed then, for her lunch with Cosgrieve; dressed in a new, odd flowered thing from Poiret. She was so gorgeous that she frightened herself. She looked critically at herself in her full-length mirror, her hand with its big new solitaires holding her gold and turquoise-mounted bag and vanity-things. She got an odd shock. The diamonds were all right. She liked them, and she knew that she did, but the turquoises didn’t go with the dress. They looked insipid. “Oh—darn!” she said, and holding her bag tight and her head high, she went to meet Cosgrieve.

At the end of their luncheon, her color in no need of rouge, she looked at Cosgrieve bravely, gaily. “I’ll tell you what you may do for me, as you’re so anxious!”

"Do tell me!" he bent across their little table toward her.

She took her time, and rouged her mouth before answering him. "Come with me to a shop and help me buy half a dozen bags and things to carry with these crazy Paris togs?"

Cosgrieve laughed softly, his fine hand playing with the gold and turquoise trinkets. "You dear child, I shall love to," he told her.

He had spoken so gently and sympathetically that she recoiled from him, vaguely troubled, and on her guard. But, as she sat thinking, her rouged mouth grew firmer. Suddenly she looked at Cosgrieve. "Where on earth do turquoises come from, anyway?" she asked him.

Cosgrieve took up the bag and looked more closely. "Sometimes from Persia—the Orient. These, I should think, must have come from Texas."

"Oh?" said Elsie queerly.

For a long moment they sat peering at one-another across the expensive debris of their luncheon table, peering with a mixture of confession and interest, holding fast to their surfaces with their oddly assorted smiles. So do the little nothings serve their turns.

Cosgrieve looked gaily forward to a maze of shops with Elsie as opportunity, as a hunter looks ahead to a silent, leafy forest.

Elsie laughed oddly. She slipped her little mirror back into its place. "I've heard," she said, "that if a woman wants to know a man, she just has to take him shopping with her. Something in it maybe. Not," she gave him a glance—the ray of sunlight in the hunter's forest—"that you need to think you'll be able to make me buy anything I don't like—"

VIII

EVENING ON THE LEFT BANK

ELSIE was sitting at her dressing-table touching her hair into place under a new, small black and silver hat that Cosgrieve had "discovered" for her, when Nelson phoned again. His voice was very gay. He asked her to taxi over and meet him at the Rotonde. "You see," he gaily argued it, "I am here already. If I were to leave the place and come over for you, we'd neither of us be here!"

Elsie didn't like it. She felt more timid of that sort of environment than any other. "You'll be there waiting?" she'd faltered a little. And for answer a gay laugh had struck her ear. "I'll be easy to find," he'd assured her.

She got out of her taxi and stood scanning

the crowded terrace. There was no sign of Nelson. The place was packed with a mass of creatures with extraordinary faces, and nearly all extremely young. When there was an older face, it looked resigned or sheepish. When it looked something else, it was revolting. Elsie thought of walking awhile and coming back, then she shook herself for her timidity. She moved toward a chair in the throng, met peering eyes everywhere, revolted. She stood aside, not knowing what to do, looking, looking. There were short-haired girls, behaving fearlessly, their hats on top of their walking-sticks, looking like the presence of another sort of girl beside them. There were classical girls with abundant hair all waved, and gestures out of National Theatres. There were girls who looked clever, were plain and tired, and shabby, and queer, who sat alone and drank alone, faces worn, their gaze upon the other side of the street. Faces, faces, everywhere; Swedish blondes with pinched red noses; raven-wing black hair under Spanish hats, turbans out of the East; black faces, white faces, none of them at peace, or even dreaming of peace. Faces they were that hovered above their creatures as

clock-faces hover above their pendulums, all of them, even when love-making, looking for something diverting to come by, in the street. Faces that talked, talked, talked, like clocks, but of other things than the portentous ticking by of time. Elsie did not get the lightness of it, it frightened her. It's breath sickened her. It seemed to her that they'd got themselves uncomfortably wedged in there just to find their smiles again over her awkwardness. They, with thin eyes, made the plump, rich and gorgeous Elsie feel all hands and feet. She was sure she wasn't over-dressed in her black and blue crêpe and her little silvery hat. Jo Dunbar had once called her, "You expensive-looking thing!" and now she felt it. "Oh where is he?" her mind complained. "He shouldn't have left me to such a rabble, alone!" Embarrassed and warm, she worked her way to a chair just inside the door at the foot of a flight of stairs. Up and down the stairs, and in and out of the rooms, ran a river of creatures; more clock-faced creatures. Up and down, and in and out of the rooms, then back again. She seemed, do as she would about it, to be in everybody's way. A negro, in quite good-looking

grey flannels, took a chair beside hers and frankly appreciated her. She was about to leave when Nelson, cool, and gay, and very much at home, came running down the stairs. "Dear girl, why didn't you come up—?" he greeted her.

"I wasn't born with a plan of this horrid place on my brain, was I? How could I know that the barn had a *loft*?" She was red and cross.

Nelson patted her arm soothingly.

Elsie looked down at his hand.

He smoked a moment then looked her straight in the eyes. "I was playing chess and for one moment forgot the time," he told her, his eyes laughing. "Do you really want to fight about it? Because," he became faintly insolent, "I don't like fighting in a place like this. We can take a taxi over to my studio, you know? The fact that we care so little about it might make a fight rather amusing?"

Elsie flushed, then laughed. "If you want to put it that way, we'll stay right here. It won't kill me, I suppose, to be with you, and I want to see what the funny show really is."

Nelson led the way to the upstairs café where

a young and grainy-skinned American college boy in a flat-topped round felt hat and spectacles, was melting Chopin out of the tin-pan piano to the disgust of a very modern young and bobbed American girl. She sat at a table close to the piano, her little round, black hat beside her glass of vermouth, her small, indignant, suffering self clad in a slip of grey and yellow gingham. "Cut it out, old hat," Elsie heard her say to the boy. "Come and talk something else with me, boy, and I'll tell you where not to take music lessons. That soft-eyed stuff is dead, and you are behaving worse than dead."

Around the room, like islands, sat men, here and there a woman, her hat off, playing chess with the men. Two Chinamen, their soft faces like blossoms, incongruous straw hats on, sat talking softly together. A negress in a green crêpe turban, her large-veined feet crammed into fancy slippers, gold hoops in her ears, sat close to a young Frenchman, both vapid in their love-making coma. There were girls, girls, girls, exceedingly young girls in childish dresses, walking up and down the place. In a corner near the dignity of the chess islands, sat an

American woman, over-strong in her early thirties. She'd wrapped her abundance in a hot-house aura of seeming convictions. Her good face was very much made up. The paint seemed to hover, a masque, just before her. A masque that did not want to settle upon its victim. A masque with a conscience. It was a face that had been destined to be washed, not painted. Under her large ringed hands—a seal ring, a wedding-ring and two or three heavy lapis lazuli modern rings, lay a pile of magazines. They were American weeklies of opinion and thought. Nelson dubbed them "The Weakies." And there faced her a rim of owl-faced young men, who listened, while her hands turned the pages, and her masque held forth.

"Goodnight," gasped Elsie, fixing her gaze upon her country woman, "is she their—Aunt?"

"Oh no, my dear Elsie, she isn't even as much as an aunt to them. Not that it matters, the poor dear. She's really very touching, I think. She's having such a bad time with herself. The very sight of *you* makes her look hungry. You, with a grown up man!" he laughed.

"Touching?" Elsie wondered over him. "She ought to be ashamed of herself. Cradle-snatcher!"

They were sitting near enough to the group to catch its drift. "Better not drink but one of those, old dear," they heard a childfaced owl advise her.

And "Old dear" considered the young owl and his advice. "If you mean I won't sleep? Who's got time to waste in sleeping. Sleeping is the crime of crimes!"

Elsie noticed the blue scoops about her eyes and the lines about her painted mouth. "I guess everybody's crazy," she sighed.

Nelson turned and looked Elsie over critically, "Not quite," he smiled. "You do look fresh and sweet." Then he murmured, "I thought you would, over here. And you are learning to buy hats. That one's lovely."

Elsie flushed, but let it go at that. It was no concern of his that Cosgrieve had picked it out for her.

Just beyond the piano by a window was a group of four women, three Americans and an English woman. One of them was doing all the talking; was telling the others something

tremendously funny. They didn't even notice Elsie, were too thoroughly enjoying themselves.

"They are painters—fashions or wood-blocks, or something of the sort," said Nelson.

The one who talked was ample and deep-breasted, her hair was dyed red, she wore much jewellery, amber and yellow and silver things. She was telling the others something, and herself laughing enormously. Her teeth and the whites of her eyes looked yellowish, all but ugly, because of the blue-pink of her make-up, but somehow she was not ugly at all, but warm and alluring.

"Anyway they don't look as if it was all about a funeral," said Elsie desperately.

"She's awfully clever," smiled Nelson. "That just disarms all the henna, doesn't it? I mean because, really, she's so good. Just a terror!" he laughed. "Inquisitive, and giddy-good." He laughed again, softly. "Dollars to doughnuts, Elsie, if you hear what's she's telling that makes them laugh so, you'd make me take you back to your expensive, but highly respectable hotel."

"You know her?"

"Lord no," said Nelson. "I'd not—dare!" And his laugh made Elsie blush.

"I *like* her," Elsie couldn't let it be.

"And that, dear child, is just to the point. Look now! she's making up to go. Look Elsie, with all your eyes, at the way she's putting it on. Bold and bad strokes! She's not deceitful about her paint, the way you are. There's none of the airless classical about *her*!"

"Oh my—goodness!" breathed Elsie, as a wild-eyed, drug-mushed face under a shabby picture hat came by, vague and bodiless as a shadow, her bleary eyes searching, searching.

"A mad American poetess," said Nelson softly. "Something crossed over from Greenwich Village, and considerably more infamous than famous. Don't look at her," he warned, "or she'll stop and talk. She's—*hell*," he murmured. "That's not blasphemy, but fact. A creature of hell, crept back to earth, sent perhaps, by old Satan, to gather news of this little place!"

"Oh *dear*," said Elsie, comically in earnest. "I don't like it here!"

"We'll go and have dinner," chuckled Nel-

son. "The restaurant's too expensive for poets and drug-tortured ghosts."

Nelson had reserved their table at one end of the restaurant by a window, green and leafy outside, the late daylight-saving sun falling softly upon the linen and glass. Elsie sat facing the room. Nelson glanced over his shoulder to see who was there. "See that chap over there in grey, with a batik "hanky?" The one with the pretty little blue eyes, in the big, blue hat? What do you guess he is?"

Elsie looked at the fair gosling-like head and neck of the young Frenchman. She sighed, then laughed a little. "He doesn't look like much to me," she confessed.

"Right as rain," smiled Nelson. "It's one on the Americans who flock here to dine, to have a look at genius! He's the chauffeur of a man I know!"

"But the girl's—sweet, and sort of artistic-looking, isn't she?" Elsie was comically puzzled.

"After all, chauffeurs are better paid than artists," commented Nelson. "Why not? Why shouldn't he be here?"

"But," said Elsie floundering and quite pink, "Doesn't the girl care about a good time?"

"Chauffeurs can give girls better times perhaps, than artists. Artists only care to give themselves a good time, and a little for vanity about how the girl looks." Then Nelson gave his attention to Elsie, to the dinner, her wine, her comfort. "Now you've had enough of side-shows. Look only at me," he commanded her gaily. And delightfully, he bent to her, chatted, charmed her, and the dinner was at its coffee, and Elsie fairly enchanted, when a man came up to their table. "Oh—hello Compton!" said Nelson, cordially rising.

Compton was a wasted, pale, sweet-faced fugitive-looking man. He was middle-aged, walked like a friendly ghost through the pink, feeding, clamoring young, and held out a delicate hand to Nelson. Nelson got him a chair, presented him to Elsie. And Elsie liked him at once, and gave him her hand simply and warmly. This was no pretending little freak ready to prove his strength by insulting her, or putting her in the wrong. This was a friendly human-being, and her eyes greeted him instinctively. He wore a loose black tie, shabby

tweeds, and a very old, many-times-cleaned wide-rimmed Panama hat. His hands were small and thin, and told of their fifty-some winters. His shoes were orderly, but cracked and as polished as his grey hair was brushed.

"You must have coffee with us, Compton," said Nelson. "Shall we have it here by the window, with Mrs. Raymond all to ourselves, or shall we be generous and take her down to purgatory and the terrace?"

For answer, Compton settled himself in his chair. "You'd be very nice to paint," he told Elsie. "There where you are, against the wall, in the twilight," his voice fell off like a casually sketched line. He faced Nelson, the light of combat flaring suddenly in his eyes. "It's high time for a great portrait painter, eh? It's a dead art. Women won't have 'em now, and no wonder, in an age that likes to paint 'em so like rotten cheese that the pictures smell!"

"Oh!" gasped Elsie, shocked.

"What's the use after all, of talking about painters and painting. Painting is a dead art. I'm dead. We're all dead; we old fellows who used to be painters."

"But," Nelson protested, "it is less than

twenty-four hours since I heard you say, Compton, that there's nothing else on earth, in heaven or in hell, worth talking about!"

"I was drunk. Very drunk," Compton reminded him gently, reproachfully.

Nelson laughed with him, gay over memories they'd no thought of telling Elsie.

"I'm perfectly certain Mrs. Raymond doesn't care about painting. She is much too beautiful to be bothered about an art. A mere art." He looked at her as if she were a piece of still-life, a bibelot. "What in the world do you put that red stuff on your mouth for, and paint your lovely little nose till it looks like a fox-terrier's muzzle, and all out of values?" he asked her, peering wistfully into her eyes. "I ask you, Nelson, doesn't it beat the Dutch?"

"Maybe," she said, "if you'll all stop making such a fuss about it, we'd stop making up?" She felt a little cross, injured.

"That's probably it," grinned Compton. "Blame the men! Well, well," he lapsed into an absent smile, "the old game's changed. When I was a kid over here, a student, even our play had something to do with work. There was a band of us, and we were all on fire,—

just blazin'!—to any little arty breeze,—with ambition. There was half a dozen of us, and sure as night came we went round to the studio of two girls we knew. They 'belonged', bless 'em. You think we just sat around talkin' wise, like all this damned "settle-down of doves" you see now? Not much! The girls had a big studio, and we rigged up a model stand like a stage, and we got up poses with artificial light, and we worked. And at ten-forty-five one of us shook down the stove for the night, and at eleven we "filed." That was play, if you like. Now they sit round and wait till they feel like work. And they don't know a damn thing. School? Not on your life! They read Clive Bell and talk new clap-trap. Poor fish! Well," he grinned, "who cares? They'll wake up dead one mornin'. Be a pretty sight for the milkman, eh?—to come by and find all that terrace down there, sittin' still, dead." He gave a sigh and smoked absently a while.

"You know," he peered at Nelson, "I'm all shot up tonight. I'm blue—!" He paused a moment gravely. "I've been to old Greyson's funeral today. A nice thing to have to do, after last night? A very decent chap, Mrs.

Raymond, and he painted well enough. Catholic, he was. They call it a mass, they had for him. At noon, at the little church down the street. Poor old Greyson! He was a wise guy to have been a Catholic. They gave him his hour of velvet and honours all right. Little old Greyson with that screechy laugh of his, tucked in there under all the black velvet silver and flowers. Silver, eh? Great! Greyson knew the painting game was up. But, funny thing about it—we've somehow got to keep on at it—us old chaps. He did, till he died. We can't stop. We've wound ourselves up so damned sincerely, you know. It's quite pathetic. It's tragic, eh? Greyson painted quite little pictures, no good at all; but he had a peach of a funeral! I think I'll be a Catholic, and save my face, too. Dear old Greyson. He'd have screeched a laugh at us from under his canopy, if he hadn't been—so dead," he ended softly.

"What did he die of?" asked Elsie absently.

Compton looked at her as if faintly shocked, then at the trees and dusk outside, then back at Elsie. He rather anxiously shifted. "Oh, I don't know. Old age maybe. Just died—.

He's been over here, like the rest of us, since 1900. The vintage is becoming rare. We all got together today, and toddled over to his funeral. God, how we hated goin'! It was ours, too. And we knew it. It was awful, looking at one another, all sallow, and greenish, and grey-headed, and bald! We sat, side by side, and listened to the sing-song. When it was over, all the mummary, we found we could still walk. We *had* to walk, damn it!—right outside again, like live men, into the sunlight. Some of us had to hurry. You can get across a falling bridge on the run, you know. We'd models engaged for the afternoon, and these days models cost money. Live models. All these young things around here who grin at us, make us talk to hear us, and call us "old hats," they don't have models. Don't believe in 'em. Not for painting. In a little while they'll be toddling to somebody's funeral and with the same-lookin' heads—" He glanced at his watch. "I must go along now. I'm playing bridge with three other old things, over at the Dome, and they'll curse me if I'm late. Good-night, Mrs. Raymond. Goodnight, Nelson!" and smiling delightfully, he took himself busily

off, his old Panama hat held against his breast in his fine small oldish hand.

"Is he a good painter?" asked Elsie, watching him go.

"I believe he hardly paints at all, any more," said Nelson. "He has just enough to live on. He goes chatting about, from one excuse to another."

Elsie had had a good deal of wine, and the night was very warm. "You," she laughed, looking fully at Nelson, "are so funny—in this mess. Do you really like it?"

"So are you," said Nelson, "Funny in this mess."

"Oh,—me," she chuckled. "I could play this game if I wanted to. It's—too easy, eh?"

"It pretty often turns out too badly," said Nelson. Then right into her eyes, he demanded, "Elsie why don't you quit fooling and go to school?"

"Maybe—I will," she said, wishing he'd let her be. She did wish he'd just like her, for once, just as she was.

"Maybe," he echoed her cynically. "You need—school, just as much as painters need it."

"You mean," she flared, "so that I'll learn to say perhaps instead of maybe, eh?"

"I do. And ever so much more," he stuck to it. "For your own sake," he temporized, smiling.

"I'd cut you out and go straight home," she told him, "except that you'd not care a darn." Her voice quivered, and her eyes gave him childish threatenings. She tried not to care. Why wouldn't he let her be, not spoil everything.

"I'd care something quite different from a darn," said Nelson. "You are a magnificent young animal. That's what everybody is, an animal; but less magnificent. Elsie, do wake up. You make your sensation so easily! Why don't you go to work and learn how to *hold* it? Garden and trim your abundance? You could be superb," he told her. "I have an idea for you. May I tell it to you one day soon? Not tonight. I want to be quite sure. Will you—would you let me help you?"

She played with her glass. Her head was turning a little, and she felt absurdly like tears. "I know what a nut I am," she said. "I'm

always wrong. Every time. To get by, I have to be still, and I love to talk. It's just awful."

"Come, let's get out of here!" For a light instant he laid his hand upon hers. He paid, led the way out, down the stairs again, where a new crowd was swarming, or new-looking, and sleeked down for the evening.

Elsie did not care in the least for the clock-faces this time, and, oddly, they paid no attention to her. She thought dizzily that she felt a good deal older than when she'd arrived. All that, in three hours' time! While Nelson got a taxi, she took restoring breaths of the evening air. She felt bruised, and red, and smoky, but quite absurdly happy. She'd leave things to Nelson. He must really like her, to bother so much about her, wanting to help her. The evening was before them. At least, another three hours. Maybe more. "*Perhaps* more," she dizzily corrected her dizzy thoughts. She didn't care what he chose to do with it, their evening. She wouldn't have trusted Jo Dunbar, or even Seymour. She'd have told them what she wanted to do. Cosgrieve wouldn't have given her the chance to trust him. Cosgrieve didn't trust himself. But Nelson had

been kind—really sweet to her tonight. They'd go to a café maybe out under the trees—maybe to his studio—Her heart gave a reckless leap at the thought. It didn't take long to have little thoughts. Between the heady wine, the warm night, the strangeness of creatures, she felt bewildered, deliciously melted.

Nelson put her inside the taxi. He spoke to the chauffeur then closed the door. His hat off, his slim hand through the door, he said, "I was in earnest, you know, about your going to school, Elsie, and I shall bully you into doing it, if I may?" He was as polite and cool as if he had just met her after a week of absence. "I have a beautiful idea for you. So beautiful that I must look at it for a while, and you with it, before I tell you. You know, it doesn't do, even for ideas, to be too beautiful. I'll call you up, or see you, no doubt, with the others. Goodnight! Awfully sweet of you to have come." And he retreated. He stood there, his hat in his hand; left her, alone, actually to go home alone, in her taxi, gasping, outraged, at nine o'clock in the evening!

IX

DIFFERENT

"HELLO, Seymour!" Dunbar rose from a table he was holding in a small restaurant not far from the American Bank palaces of the Place Vendôme; a modest restaurant where economical lunches helped to balance dinners elsewhere that were often otherwise. In a moment they were considering the menu. "I'm all in," Dunbar laughed confessingly, after they'd ordered.

"You got in at three," commented Seymour with a glance not all sympathy.

"I dined out with our Elsie, and she wouldn't go home. She all but talked me to death. You know, Seymour, the kiddo is very much mixed up."

Seymour grinned. "I *know*. You may not

realize that it was beginning to be dawn the night before, when for the same good reason, I came softly in, shoes in hand! Nelson coming to lunch?"

"Do' no," said Dunbar, deep in the menu.

"Nelson's going to burn out if he keeps it up. Since he quit me, without notice, the other day, and began living over in his "work-shop" as he calls it, I've hardly seen him. But he looks white and tired."

"Well, I'm glad he quit you, old man," said Dunbar, "since I've got his bunk. It's pretty smooth, our little flat. As for Nelson, he looks like the dickens."

"It's the novel. Funny game, he's playing. I've been to his place. Books and a table and two chairs, and a sort of bed-room up in a balcony. He can't stay there when it gets cold, and I've told him so."

"Sure there isn't a girl?" suggested Dunbar, suppressing a yawn.

"Can't be sure," said Seymour. "But she covers her tracks if there is one. No, Dunbar, I believe Nel's just throwing all there is of him into his novel."

"Read it?"

"Lord no," smiled Seymour. "He fairly sits on it, like a wary hen on her eggs, when I'm there. I hope it goes, but he says it won't."

"Then why the devil—?" Dunbar wondered.

"I asked him why. More fool I! He laughed in that uncanny way of his and began talking American politics. There he is now! Hi, Nel'! Come over here with us. Sure there's room! You oyster, where've you been feeding for the last week?"

Nelson thought it over, then he hung up his hat and joined them. "Eating? Why, in an antique shop in the rue des Saints Péres. I've bought a beautiful table. I'm getting soft again. Reverting to my anti-war type, buying beautiful furniture."

"Eating there?" Dunbar stared at him.

"Why, not exactly," said Nelson. "It was the table that did the eating." Then he dropped the subject, gave them a bit of business news he'd picked up at the bank. And, on that safe track, they chatted through to their coffee; the exchange, the Ruhr, American oil and democracy, British labor, Turkish women, British, Russian princesses. and the newest things in tea-rooms.

"How is H. R. H. Gold Elsie?" Nelson asked them.

They grinned. "Very seedy," said Dunbar. "Off her feed," said Seymour.

"Really?" Nelson considered them, gravely.

"Do you mean to say, Nel', that you haven't seen her this week?"

"She did me the honor of dining with me, on the "Left Bank," last Monday night," said Nelson, his eyes laughing, his face and voice exceedingly grave.

Seymour and Dunbar grinned at one another. "Well, it's great. A week ago, one short week! —the four of us were dining together, clinging together, thinking like one. Now—"

"It's different?" suggested Nelson.

"The very important question is, is the change her fault, or ours?"

"Fault?" Nelson thought it over. "I called her up Monday morning and asked her to dine. I told her I was sick of having you two dubs in the way of an entirely intellectual contact, and I wanted her to myself."

They chuckled a moment over their coffee. "Did she talk to you about "going to school," as she puts it?" asked Dunbar.

"I mostly did the talking," smiled Nelson reminscently. "What do you mean by school?"

"I had hours of the same song on Tuesday night," said Seymour. "Only I'm damned if I think it funny. The poor girl's pathetic. All that money and looks, and no friends. No women friends. What can a man do about it? She'd—" he smiled and tried to swim to a phrase. "There's so much of her, and so lonesome, but *I* don't know any women who'd like her—"

"She's perfectly nutty on the subject of women friends," said Dunbar.

Nelson took his time. "You think she means it—all this fuss about school and lessons?"

"She does," said Dunbar. "First she's bent on seeing Raymond. She's very heady about that. Cosgrieve thinks it foolish. He says that Raymond won't see things as she wants him to. Few men could. She just wants to "quit friends" but, woman-like wants a scene. Cosgrieve keeps putting her off, hoping she won't go down. And that over, she vows she's going to cut out everything and learn to "behave herself" and how to spend her money!"

"It's amusing—the whole story," said Nel-

son absently. "She's involved herself with a very animated audience of four now—you two, Cosgrieve and me. She'll have to make good; very good indeed. It will be interesting to see the first act—a suite in her hotel perhaps—shades of Pershing, Mary and Doug'! Lessons in French from indignant aristocrats—conversations, perhaps with Raymond Duncan! Or perhaps, cleverly, none of that, but a convent. *That*," he laughed gaily, "would lead to a third act with a gorgeous get-away, over the garden wall. She's really very entertaining, very suggestive. I could write ten novels about her."

"She's not joking, Nel'," insisted Seymour.

"Nor am I," said Nelson.

"I'm the goat of the situation," laughed Dunbar. "You see I brought her that first Sunday night. Maybe I shouldn't have, but I thought she was game. Girls now don't care—"above caring," he laughed, not too mirthfully. "She always was a funny kid. A beauty, and all the high-school wanting to carry her books for her. She was *fun*—but she always got away. She walked with her head up. She didn't seem to care for girls. She used to walk to school

with her father—on his way to his office. She was a funny kid. She knows, of course, that we've got a lot of friends that she never meets. This isn't a village, after all. Girl-friends, I mean. She knows that groggy old Chatham knows our friends, and that Chatham's girls of course do not. We let her in on Chatham's girls. Of course, it's hard to answer!" He laughed, but caught himself back. "She thinks I wouldn't have dared to let her in for Chatham's girls except that she was a nobody at home. Poor kiddo! But what can a man do?" He laughed with sudden gaiety. "You know, there isn't a soul in our little old home town who wouldn't think me after her money, if they knew I was eating about nine dinners a week with her. She's really a peach, and it's all darned unjust, and silly. But think of the girls we know? There isn't one of them who would stand for her."

"It's very hard to be so beautiful," smiled Nelson, smoking absently. "Of course, being monumental, and beautiful, does not protect one against being lonesome." Then, gaily looking from one to the other, "You two should toss pennies—marry her—?"

"Fat chance we'd have to get her," grinned Dunbar.

"She wants Raymond back," said Seymour. "In love with her husband. Funny old-fashioned streak in her. Sweet, I think. I'll bet my French bonds that she gets him back, too."

"I won't take your bet, but frankly I hope that Bill comes back. She'd be safer?" he smiled. "If she's really seriously disposed to have herself turned and trimmed, she can go rather far. She's very disquieting, floating about, like a lovely ship—a ship of state—the American state. Poor Gold-Elsie!"

"I told her to try herself out with French lessons," said Dunbar.

"The dickens you did?" smiled Nelson. "What about English lessons?"

They stared at one another, forgetting to laugh.

"You know," said Dunbar, "my two sisters would simply die if they knew I was going about with her. What on earth *are* we all up to anyway, with her?"

For the first time, the question briefly put, was hung between them, and they all sat looking at it, faintly startled.

"A nice question," said Nelson. "Her sort is reasonably clear. We are four men, four different sorts. We can scarcely all four have the same aim, and still, I fancy, that's the way of it."

"And what do you mean by that?" demanded Seymour.

"I mean that it will exactly depend upon what she does with each of us. Not in the least on us."

That made silence, shock, and Dunbar and Seymour sat back in their chairs. Then, "It seems—rather rotten, talking about her," said Seymour. "She's so straight. It comes over me pretty often that we've got a great deal, aside from her, as women go, and she's nothing but us, as men go. And no women at all."

"It just comes over you, does it?" Nelson smiled. "In a nut-shell, our Elsie wants a woman friend. How we have failed!" he laughed. "She won't find it on this earth," he went on. "Not while she is young, and so desirable. She plays so straight, is really so good, and beautiful. No. Even behaving perfectly, and talking less, and correctly, she will always be, is doomed to be, a man's woman. But, you

know," he hesitated, looking from one to the other with sudden frankness, "if she'll work, if she's straight about it, I know exactly her school—a woman who could *make* her."

"Who—Nelson?" they asked him.

"Why, Judith Ardley," said Nelson.

"Why—of course!" said Seymour, as the idea dawned upon him. "She's the woman behind that first story of yours—"Failure's Wife," eh?"

"Yes," said Nelson. "And she's—different."

"She'll do it?" Dunbar queried. "She'll bother with her?"

Nelson forgot to answer. "She's going soon, to see Raymond?" he asked.

Dunbar nodded. "We're going down in Cosgrieve's car, or one of them, on Saturday afternoon."

"You're going too, eh? To your own funeral, old man?" Nelson laughed. "That's really very decent of you—"

"Sour grapes," chuckled Dunbar.

"We're *late*," said Seymour, looking at his watch.

They were, and they hurried. As they crossed the wide Place Vendôme toward the

great doors of their bank, Nelson said, "No word of Mrs. Ardley to Elsie, till I've asked her. I mean till I've asked Mrs. Ardley."

"Right-oh," said Dunbar. "A false hope would kill the kiddo, now."

"Oh, I don't think so," Nelson smiled, as inside the bank they parted, each to his job.

X

JUDITH

MRS. Ardley smiled with pleasure, over Nelson's card. "Serve the tea in the petit salon, Thérèse. Toast, and the Sèvres tea-things," she said to the maid.

She found Nelson at the window, looking through the lace at the street below. It was a narrow street, just off the Avenue du Bois de Bologne. "My dear boy, I am so happy to see you." She looked affectionately down upon the back of his fine head as he bent over her hands. "It has been long, ever so long, since you have been here. Have you brought me something to read?" She spoke slowly, surely, deliciously, her fineness, her delicately flowered, silvery dress, her gesture, her room and her grey eyes all at one, and all beautiful.

"Yes, there's something to read—another chapter." He laid a manuscript upon her little desk. "But I came, aside from just wanting to, for a mad reason, Judith—" He stood peering at her, suddenly laughing. "It seems a ridiculous reason, when I see you—sweet and quiet as you are. It is good to see you always. Perhaps I'll never even tell you the real reason!"

She sat with her chin on her hand, her soft lace-lined sleeve falling back from her arm, her eyes smiling over him.

"Lucky to find you alone, I am. May I stay a long time?" he asked boyishly.

"I've told Thérèse to make our tea," she said. "You may stay long enough. I'm awfully tired, Nel'-dear, and had absolutely taken the afternoon off. I forbade Thérèse to answer the telephone. I don't know why I am so tired. Getting old, perhaps. Certainly I can't drive work and play together as lightly as I used to do. Before the war it seemed rather like fun to me. But now, the American woman with money to spend—heavens but she *is* fatiguing. One's friends used to have money to spend. They, poor dears, dress now in bar-

gains. And, working for people who could not possibly be one's friends is really work."

Nelson shifted his long thin legs in their grey summer flannels, and laughed a little, "Before you have made confession absolutely impossible, I might as well tell you that it is about one of them, the very headiest queen of them all—a new woman spender—that I have come. I'm sorry, but it is."

Judith gave a gesture of amused hopelessness with her fine hands. "And I let you in on my day of rest; trusted you!" Affectionately she considered him, in the great arm chair before her. "One is never let off!" she sighed absently.

"You? Of course not. Being *on* is your genius. You shouldn't even dream of rest. And now," he bent toward her, laughing, "the monstrous moment of them all is hustling up to you. Rest? Poor Judith!" He stooped to peer at her, touched her soft sleeve. "When this rich young blonde, oh, twice your size and so beautiful that she lifts bulk to a pitch, once finds you, you'll never have another moment's rest in all your life. She'll need you so, and you will so need her!"

"You mean," Judith puzzled over him, "that she wants clothes?—togger, they call it now."

"No," he looked at her gravely. "She's got clothes. Too many clothes. She wants a soul."

Judith's grey eyes opened, astounded, then a ripple of mirth glinted across. "What on earth can that have to do with what I want, Nel'—dear? There's no commission on souls. Unless there's something new in shops that I don't know about?"

"There's nothing new in shops that you don't know about," he gaily reassured her. "The only soul-shop that I ever heard of is right here, your own."

"You aren't going to take my last breath, dear boy, by telling me that you have fallen in love with—something *new*?"

"Oh dear, no," he reassured her. "I'm not greatly changed. I've been living a lunchless life for the love of a very old table for the last two weeks. No, I'm not hungry *now*," he assured her. "The table was paid for the day before yesterday." He was watching her hands among the tender old Sèvres tea-things, thinking how lovely she was, how satisfying. And fifty; as old as his mother. "No, I'm not going

to tell you that. I'm not in love with her. Not in a dangerous way. She's a big, warm, sweet young thing, but very obvious. I get bored with obvious women. I know better. I mean, she *is* terribly dangerous, Judith, for with all that untamed warmth and gorgeousness, she's very—*good*. I fancy she rather detests me. I'm not in love with her, but I am very much intrigued with the woman she might become. With a soul, you see, Judith?"

Judith beat the air with her hands. "You are a true-to-type man!" she smiled. "You'd have me sacrifice my peace, give her *my* soul—"

"Oh," he gasped, "what a terrible idea!"

"Write it then, the idea, but leave me my soul," she laughed softly. "You *are* a dear boy after all."

"Do you really detest these times, Judith?" he wondered over her. "I think I'm rather in love with it all—the spectacle. Clashing, cruel, bold, tyrannical, spending, jazzing creatures. And—so frightened! All the row and silliness just to cover up the swarming little fears. A gorgeous blonde with her soul not found, with all her money and not a soul-shop that she knows of on earth. Typical, eh? Why hate her,

Judith. Why? You two were, simply, born to irritate and teach one another! What a show you two would make! The Soul and the Body. The super-spectacle."

"And what is she to teach me?" Judith demanded, her voice clear and bright. She glanced defensively over her perfect little room.

"Oh," he protested, "she won't, she could not change you. But she will cheer you up—brighten you. Not for all the blondes on the earth would I risk your being changed. You dear and beautiful woman, you scorn, ever so kindly, of course, but you *know* how your kindness is cruel to the new and crude."

"But you, Nel'! You have always been much more cruel about them than I. I've got to accept them to make my living. And they are usually good sorts, and generous, and appreciative—"

Nelson's gay laugh stopped her.

"You see, I must hang onto the band-wagon, but you may be as much of a snob as you please," she smiled reproachfully.

"Not with my gorgeous blonde about, I can't," he assured her. He studied her, smiling,

thinking something over. "You've been to the Belgian picture show?" he asked her irrelevantly.

"Yes, of course," she looked at him with a touch of impatience. "Who hasn't?"

"Looked at the Stevens?"

"Yes," she smiled. "Of course I have, and," she added with spirit, "you are not to tell me that I am like those sweet women of his, all in dotted swiss and with the light upon their hair."

"No," he laughed, "but you might be. You see you are not allowed to stop. They call it crystalizing now. I won't have it. My new, formidable blonde doll to whom you are to give a soul, won't have it. She will shock you, stir you and irritate you horribly, but she will carry you on vividly with her. You, delicate thing, in her strong, blonde arms. God, what arms they are, Judith! She will give you a wonderful life. She's as tall as I am, just. You dear, you'll be forced, by her *power*, Judith, to stand on your tip-toes, and to bruise your hands in moulding her. It's going to be mighty tough work," he laughed at her dismay.

"But I won't undertake it," she told him. "You are simply not talking sense, Nel'."

"Oh yes you will," he told her. "It's your chance, Judith Ardley, to crown your long drawn-out insipid "job" with the making of a masterpiece. You know perfectly well, if left to yourself, you'll gradually sit back and fade out. I," he laughed again, "simply won't allow it, I tell you! I'm pretending to buy a doll a soul, but I'm really just saving you."

"But you terrify me, Nel'! What are you really telling me? You give me a picture of myself—held up on a dazzling flood—my pretty quiet rooms floating away from me, like boxes. I'm so peaceful here, and you come bothering me about some young blond creature. I hate her already."

"Too peaceful," he stuck to it. "It won't do, you know. Nobody really wants peace or we'd have it. Modern people don't like peace. You've got to play the game, my Judith. And the game is clashings and contrasts. And, in spite of this sweet grey place you cling to up here, you *want* to play the game. Everybody does. The only outsiders are the ones who can't play. You are simply fooling yourself."

She looked about her, through the open doors into the salon, and Nelson's eyes fol-

lowed hers to the closed piano. It was covered with grey velvet. There were things, a lamp and flowers, upon it, and a closed violin-case. "You made me cry with that story of yours—about his music," she told Nelson softly. "You were too true, in that story," she reproached him. "I don't think one should do that, do you? Really? About one's friends?"

"Not as true as truth," he reminded her. "When I think of the years that you shopped to support him. He, a lazy, beauty-parlor idol." They were still a moment. "It is sweet up here, and peaceful," he went on. "And you are dying hard. Of course you'll do it finely. But, in secret, Judith, you stand in there with your locked piano and violin, and you are frightened. You have really resolved, more than once to sell all the old stuff and go in for willow and chintz. Now, haven't you? And you look out between the curtains, and you wonder if you might not plunge in and like it. The new current. The idea of plunging in *haunts* you. You give your desire away in the very way you do your hair. You've conceded,—you've pulled it down over your ears. Peace?" he laughed sharply. "That's the lie

I lost my ribs for. Don't blather to me about peace! Do you remember my friends, Seymour and Jo Dunbar?"

"Of course. You know that I do," she sighed lightly. "What have they to do with it?"

"I don't know. They are both—in love with her. If that's being in love. We have all been looking after her. Also a man named Cosgrieve."

"I know him quite well," said Judith. "I helped his two sisters with their trousseaux, quite long ago, before the war. Dear girls they were, too. He *likes* her?"

"I said love," smiled Nelson. "But I don't know Cosgrieve. Dunbar and Seymour have been looking after her—badly and selfishly, like men. Man's selfishness simply pursues the beautiful child. She's so *damned* handsome; a man struts to show her off. Of course he makes an ass of himself, but that does nothing for her. She's alone and lonesome. She just "goes along." We have dined her, and considerably wined her. We have not in the least protected her from Johnny Chatham and his stud of girls. Last night, Judith, in the glare of a restaurant,

she cried like a big hurt baby because we had mixed her up with Chatham's "street rags." That's her name for them, not mine. She wailed that she had never been introduced to a single one of our mothers or sisters. She cried herself into a red and purple temper, and she laid us out."

"But," said Judith Ardley indignantly, "she was perfectly right."

"You dear!" Nelson shone upon her. "You hit the very nail. She is always right—disconcertingly right. As right as Ben Franklin or Abraham Lincoln. She is the one hundred per cent best American. That is just the reason why you must teach her how to behave herself. You see, it's her speech—her voice. And being all gold, and monumental, for she is just that—monumental—it's difficult. You see?"

"But really, Nel' dear, I can't give her grammar lessons!"

"As to mere grammar rules, she knows them, better than you or I."

"What *do* you want me to do for her, dear boy?" Then, warily, "Who *is* she?"

Nelson, with the sudden thought of telling

Judith Ardley all about Elsie's "Mama" and her hairpin money, shook with laughter.

"But, a young woman, a blonde, a monumental blonde, who cries in a restaurant! Oh no!" Judith defended herself.

"You know," said Nelson oddly, "I think it was rather wonderfully sweet, her crying like a big kid at Weber's Tavern. She had every man in the place ready to murder us."

Judith shuddered. "What is the rich child's name?" she asked absently.

"Mrs. Raymond," said Nelson. "Elsie Raymond. Mrs. *Bill* Raymond," he laughed at her bewildered face.

"Mrs.—?" Judith gasped. "But where on earth is *Bill* then?"

"Somewhere in France," smiled Nelson. Then, sitting in the quiet, delicately faded room, Nelson told all that he knew about Elsie. He talked till Judith sent him away. "You have hypnotized me. Do go, and give me time to think. Besides I'm dining with a girl who wants a trousseau. I *must* not be late, or weary, or absent-minded, or dull. The girl is horribly rich and independent! She'll chuck me if I bore her."

"Judith—dear," said Nelson standing before her, age so oddly, so charmingly forgotten between them, "just use your head, and make the very most of this chance. You are precisely what Elsie needs."

"Gold Elsie?" murmured Judith with a cynical shrug.

He shook his head sadly. "I'd hoped that you wouldn't call her that. You. Everybody does, once or twice! But Judith, I'm in terrible earnest. You'll be able to chuck the shops, the tiresome brides and their trousseaux, and the compromising way of commissions. You'll be so glad to!"

"To chuck them?—my dream!" she confessed. "It's a long, hard death, being smotherd out by frillies," she smiled. "You have no idea how tired I am."

"Yes I have," he insisted. "Tonight, Judith, read my story, my chapter, after you've got rid of your silly bride and her frillies. Will you? The little girl in my story is only about half the size of Elsie, but she, poor child, gets smothered out of life, though not quite for the same reason. But smothered. You are already responsible for Elsie. You are your sister's

keeper. I can tell by the desperate look in your eyes that you feel it, know it, Judith. Elsie's your fate!" And with a laugh he rose to leave her.

When he'd gone she found herself looking out between the curtains. He'd said she'd do that. She stood by the draped piano and the violin-case. *Failure's Wife*, Nelson had called her in his story. Now she was becoming little more than a relic—Failure's relic. The room, the whole apartment seemed so shadowy and still, without his young voice—

XI

MARIE-LOU PLEADS FOR ELSIE

LATE that same night, Judith Ardley, propped luxuriously among pale rose embroidered pillows in her beautiful bed, rested for a little while. She'd dined with a dull eager girl who wanted a trousseau. "Friend-clients" Nelson had dubbed her shoppers. With this girl she'd been bored beyond the telling. Her hands, that Nelson so frankly loved to look at, rested upon his manuscript. It was the last chapter of his first book. She realized a little of what it meant to him—a young man's first novel. He was such a rebel about the rules of the game. She'd begged him to be happier in his themes, and he'd said, "Oh damn all that. I will be when I am." She loved Nelson's reticences. They gave value to his confessions.

She knew she'd been able to help him with her untroubling love. He'd not filled, of course, the gap her war-killed son had left in her life, but he'd helped her to go on living. She'd so needed sympathy and had found it so hard to take. She loved his acid-sweet ways that smiled, and helped to smile, no matter what stood back. "Funny, stubby writing," she smiled. "Stubby like his eye-lashes, and like them, letting one in for things!" He certainly had been letting her in for things with his preposterous big blonde doll, his new Gold-Elsie! She shuddered. And now, this last chapter—even that, he'd said, would help Elsie. She laughed, remembering his laugh, and then she began to read.

MARIE-LOU

Chapter 31

I

THE door of Anna's living-room burst open and Adèle came in unannounced, her agonized face excusing conduct. Anna's own maid stood back in the hall, stiff and indignant, then closed the door again, disdainfully. Anna stood shocked, waiting. Adèle could not speak, spread

her hands, and dropped them, some alarming wordless story told in her gesture. Her tear-stained eyes looked like black thumb-strokes upon the powdered pallor of her face. "Oh Madame!" She came close, imploringly, a note in her shaking hand. "Come quick with me. It is from Mademoiselle Marie-Lou—"

Anna, stiff with fright, took the note. She gave the cowering Adèle a glance. Adèle was traditional, a perfect 'maid' from a play of intrigue. In her ears were false pearls, her square face was soft with powder, her hair was black—too black. And her eyes—wise, round, shallow black eyes, were like traps. A sad sort of maid for a Marie-Lou! Anna, trying not to face the thing before her, resolved to warn Marie-Lou about Adèle. Marie-Lou must send Adèle away. She gave a bad impression. Her own hands, more swift than steady, tore open the envelope, while she held to her senses with her useless resolving.

"Anna dearest,

"I am doing a thing that takes all my courage. It is so very hard to go away from you, my dear, dear friends! You will surely know how hard it is. And it isn't going to be happy

for you, to do the things I must ask you to do for me, but I see no other way. And I know that you will forgive me.

“Please come back with Adèle, and bring Hal’ with you. And do not any of you come into my room alone. Hal’ will know what to do. Men are all so *efficient*, Anna dear, and we can’t seem even to learn to be at all. Men always have a plan. They know what to do. I think, though maybe it sounds foolish—even a little mad, that it is just that that I can no longer endure, that has made me see what a failure I am. Just that lack of efficiency that has broken my heart with the *grief* of seeing myself. So weak, and useless, and helpless, Anna! I don’t know what to do. I never know, never will know.

“There is a paper on my piano, and another on my desk. They will tell you, in detail, what I’d like to have done with my things and with me. And Anna—dear, I will thank you—somehow. You will know that I do. I do now, with all the strength there is left in this tired-out heart of mine.

“No one in particular is in the least to blame for what I am doing. I want to say that to

you Anna, clearly, so that you will always really know that it is true. Nothing could be more dreadful to me than that anyone should be blamed. Paris, my life here near you, and our little group of friends, has been too beautiful, too wonderful for me. Too full of the utmost that I can understand of beauty and of tragedy, for me. Hopeless and luckless me! Whichever way I turn. I can't endure any more of it. I can't go on. I *see* the rest, the something bigger and impersonal, that you my dear gifted friends understand, possess; but I can't *take* it. Everything, everything hurts me so! You all seem always to be so sweetly sharing gifts with me, that I do not know what to do with. You see, Anna? I look, all the time, at beautiful things beyond me. I am starving inside my own unbreakable limitations. And Anna, as I have grown to love your beauty of mind, all of your minds, I have come to *hate* your skill. It's jealousy—not ugly jealousy, but just longing that makes me hate it. I haven't any skill! I can't speak. I can't do anything. I am not even loved. Not necessary to anyone. Being young I can comfort you tired ones. I see that.

But I'll be old and *horrible* in my uselessness one day. It makes me so unhappy to distress you, but I can't go without trying to tell you why, can I? You dear, dear friends of mine. How you have hurt me sometimes. Just tortured me. I can't stand it any longer. You have shown me beauty, usefulness, power; and I've sat by, useless and mute. If I had music or painting, or writing. If I even had something, some one, as an outlet for all I feel! My heart is tired out, just broken, Anna, and the life chokes me, and I can't, can't *say* it! Do you see, Anna?

"Forgive me, dear, dear friends, for so troubling you. I believe, really believe, that I'll find rest now, and peace. Try to think of me that way. And try a little to justify me! I *have* justified myself. My love, my love, Anna dear, to you all!

MARIE-LOU."

II

THE taxi with its three white faces peering out drew up at the apartment house in the narrow old Paris street. The dank walls rose

to the sky, up to their dormer windows and Marie-Lou's window boxes.

"No place for a girl to live anyway," Hal' complained as they climbed the stairs to face the mystery of how Marie-Lou had chosen to go.

Adèle unlocked the door and, close together, the three went in. The curtains were drawn. "My letter," said Adèle softly, "was on the kitchen table, with the one for you, Madame."

They went into the living-room together, Hal' brusquely opening the curtains. They breathed and looked about. On the black piano lay a piece of paper: "I am in my bedroom. No one is to come in alone. There is money in my desk, plenty, I think, for everything. My home address is there, and a letter to my people. It tells them everything there is to tell. And if it isn't too difficult, I'd like to be cremated.—Goodbye again.

M.-L."

The three, close together again, Adèle her face half-covered with her crumpled apron, faced the bedroom door. "I am in my bedroom. No one is to come in alone." Anna

opened the door—softly, slowly, carefully, till it was wide.

There she lay, little Marie-Lou crumpled, her face upon her arm, the hard bright little pistol flung across the room.

III

“No, no, no, Madame, I regret,” the police in charge told Anna. “Though it is a very clear case of suicide, no suicide may be cremated. It might, after all, Madame, turn out to have been a crime.” That had made Anna stagger, left her blank and wordless as midday light.

Anna was up there alone with Marie-Lou. Hal’ had gone to tell the others, to cable her family, to do all he could. Adèle was sitting in her darkened kitchen. Anna stood by a window. Her shoulder touched the sloping wall, her hand the closed piano. ‘It might, after all, Madame, turn out to have been a crime.’ “Oh,” she gasped to the April clouds flying high above the roofs, “It was a crime—a city crime. It was death by a two edged knife. It was we, her friends, who killed little Marie-

Lou. With our skill—our glib skill, our damnable efficiency! Poor immutable little girl!” And she went to the bed where Marie-Lou was lying, at peace. On her knees, her warm arm across the voiceless body, she begged forgiveness, in her tears. But little Marie-Lou was more than ever still.

Then, the next morning, Judith sent Nelson his answer.

“My dear Nel’,

“Your Marie-Lou has pleaded successfully for your Elsie, though I can’t help feeling that she—your new gold goddess—will pull my quiet world down and laugh at my dust. But I don’t want to hurt anybody with my “glib facilities.” What a humbleness you throw over all my harmless sophistication!

“Why not bring the band to dine with me? “Seymour and Dunbar” as you call them? Why not bring her without any idea of why? Just to see if, possibly, we can be friends? One night next week; Thursday if you like, at eight o’clock. I warn you that I’m not eager, that

I won't be bullied, and that I shall, mercilessly, put her through her paces.

“As to Marie-Lou—I want to look at you when I tell you what I think of her.

Affectionately,

JUDITH ARDLEY.”

XII

THE HAIRPIN DUCHESS

(A sketch for a play by Richmond Nelson, after he had listened to Dunbar tell of Elsie's night at Cosgrieve's chateau and her interview with Bill Raymond).

(Elsie, arrives at Cosgrieve's place, his chateau, the first edifice deserving the name that she has ever seen. With her, Dunbar and Cosgrieve. The place is splendid—beauty caught back just in time from ruin. The scene: a terrace. Wide lawn and a garden sweep from the glass doors and many windows of the great panelled salon to a low stone wall, the wall fretted and rusted with lichens. Along the wall is a double row of tilleul trees, an alley of thick leaves making shade in the hottest noontime. The terrace wall drops down and

down to a road below that winds from the great main gate, over Cosgrieve's miles. Miles of lovely France, washed in blue and gold air, away to the tree-embroidered sky-line—sheep grazing, little houses in great clumps of trees, brooks with stone-arched bridges, flower-starred grass—a tapestry).

SCENE ONE

(On the terrace. Elsie, looking tall in her long, light silky coat and veils, is seated in a deep garden chair. Dunbar and Cosgrieve with her, and an old servant arranging the tea. They have just arrived. A maid disappears with wraps on her arm. Elsie lets her coat slip off her shoulders and looks about her).

Elsie: Well, this *is* the real cheese, eh?

Cosgrieve: Glad you think so. I have word that Raymond will be at the stables waiting for me in a quarter-hour. He wants me, at once, before the night, to ride over certain fields with him. I'm tired, but he's never tired. So that's that. He bosses me just as he bosses the place—splendidly. You two stay here, just where

you are, and Dunbar, you just casually hang over the wall as we go by and look at my landscape. I am determined that you shall see Raymond, Elsie, before you make up your mind to disturb him. We'll ride by, just under the wall. You, Elsie, can watch from under the tilleuls. Raymond has played into our hands, poor lad. When you have seen him, I hope you'll see it as I do—better to let well enough alone!

Elsie: Bill never says that about anything, does he? Anyway, you are mighty kind.

Cosgrieve exits by the salon door. Elsie opens her cigarette-case, Dunbar stands by her chair with a light.

Jo' Dunbar, I'm all in. I'm simply scared to death.

Dunbar: (Munching cake, ruminates) You've nothing to lose. Just don't let Raymond see you. Cosgrieve can be trusted to look after Raymond. Great chap, Cosgrieve, isn't he?

Elsie: Think so? Really?

Dunbar: Gone on you, isn't he, old girl? Like the rest of us.

Elsie: Very like—the rest of you!

Dunbar: (Laughs gaily) Well, well, the wall is high enough! You can see without being seen, eh? After they've got by, you can come to the edge and have a real look. Lordy, Elsie, but it's a lovely old place. Money is power all-right, all-right.

Elsie: It hasn't done much for *me*.

Dunbar: Hasn't it? (laughs significantly) You look very white around the gills, old girl. Brace up! You know it was your own little idea to come down here. Now you've got your way, you've got to play the game.

Elsie: (Insolently) I'll play the game, Joey, and right over your silly head. Don't *you* be frightened.

Dunbar hears voices, and the clatter of hoofs. Rises and hurries to the wall. Elsie runs to her place in the shadow of the tilleuls.

Dunbar: (Turning and gazing at Elsie who moves a step nearer to him). What a *man*, by Jove!

Elsie: They are coming?—Jo? (Looks helpless, panicky).

Dunbar: (Nods) They are coming through the gates into the road. He looks as if he owned the place—Raymond does, I mean.

Raymond and Cosgrieve ride by, stopping a moment to chat with Dunbar, whom Cosgrieve presents to Raymond.

Raymond's voice: Too bad you didn't bring Mr. Dunbar along, Cosgrieve. The place looks wonderful after the rains of last week.

Cosgrieve: Never thought of it! Dunbar's a city product. We'll bring him around tomorrow.

They ride on. Elsie moves forward slowly, like a sleep-walker. Dunbar joins her, catching her arm, cautioning prudence. She shakes him off, looks him up and down, and deliberately leans on the wall, in full light. She throws everything into the risk, just to see Raymond. Dunbar, amused as alarmed, stands back, watching for consequences.

SCENE TWO

(What Elsie sees).

Raymond is riding with ease, his hand upon the living bronze arch of the horse's neck, chatting with Cosgrieve. He is the picture of health. He is very groomed, but is dressed in rustic flannels, open at the throat, and high

army boots. At the far end of the wall the terrace curves back, showing a slope of meadows, rich in yellow grain and flaming poppies. Against old trees at the crest of a slope, is a farm house, a path dropping down through the grain to the road. The road passes, curves outward and disappears into the dark trees. Lovely, peaceful, traditional,—more tapestry.

As Elsie leans far out to see, the girl comes running down the path, waving a letter for Raymond. She gives him the letter, Raymond's hand catching her hand with the paper. She goes round to Cosgrieve and shakes hands with him, chatting gaily, with many gestures. Then she stands a moment, her hand upon the neck of Raymond's horse, looking up at him while he reads. She stands back at the foot of the path. Raymond and Cosgrieve lift their hats. The late afternoon sun enters into the scene, drenching them in light, making their every gesture tell, beautifying them. The girl's dress is white and all but sleeveless—the French-woman's summer uniform. She is very slim, and tanned, and her black hair is clear-drawn against the wheat.

The men ride on, the girl watching Bill,

Elsie watching them, Dunbar watching Elsie. At the edge of the wood Raymond glances back at the girl. She waves her two high-lifted hands. The horsemen disappear. She breaks off a tall weed and trails it aimlessly at the edge of the path as she goes idly back to the house, and in at the door. She walks listlessly, as if Raymond had taken the light away with him. The world is still; the woods, meadow, house with fine rising smoke; all still. As still as tapestry hung in an empty room.

SCENE THREE

Elsie comes slowly back to her chair, sits looking before her, turning her rings. She looks up at Dunbar; laughs shockingly. She lights a cigarette, chokes down the smoke to stop her tears. She turns away from Dunbar, who, all sympathy, comes and sits near her. The old servant comes out and clears away the tea-things. She sits watching the servant, her chin on her hand, unstrung, wholly dejected.

Cosgrieve enters by path up the garden. He stands, peering across the flowers at Elsie. There is a clap-clap of hoofs—Raymond pass-

ing under the wall with the two horses. Elsie stares at Cosgrieve, then gives him, suddenly, a reckless smile. Cosgrieve hurries to her.

Cosgrieve: You saw—? Elsie?

(Elsie's voice fails her).

Dunbar: I'll toddle along and dress for dinner, and leave you two to fight it out.

Cosgrieve: Toddle along if you like, old man, but don't dress. Only the three of us, you know.

Dunbar: (Going) That suits *me*!

Cosgrieve: (Standing before Elsie) Well—?

Elsie: (Sharply) Very well, thank you!

Cosgrieve: You see now that it is better to let him be?

Elsie: No, I do not. Did you arrange all that scene down there? Quite like a movie—!

Cosgrieve: You flatter me. The thing happened just as it might have happened every day. I'm glad you saw it.

Elsie: Glad, are you? Thanks.

Cosgrieve: (Indignantly) While you watched them, I was watching you. You quite broke me up, Elsie. Dear girl, let Raymond be. Go your own way. You and Raymond are

both right, but you are wrong together. You seem to be from different ends of the earth.

Elsie: What on earth *am* I right for? Little parties with you, paper hats and too much to drink, and no idea what you all do between parties? That's a lot to live for, eh?

Cosgrieve flushes and walks to the wall. Elsie rises and walks after him. They face one another, their heads high. Cosgrieve smiles first.

Cosgrieve: You certainly can't imagine that you were made for love in a cottage, Elsie?

Elsie: (Quivers) You think—Bill was made for that?

Elsie turns from him, leans on the wall staring over the meadows all glowing in wine-red light.

I'm—up against it! (pause) I know what to do for them, but where do *I* get off?

Cosgrieve: Damn it, Elsie, you've nothing to do for them. You American women are so confoundedly philanthropic. You don't know how to let a man's little passing sins be!

Elsie: Is that so! (Laughs oddly).

Cosgrieve: (Studying her) It is so—my dear girl.

Elsie: (Paying no attention to him) You see, there's an awful lot of me to *get off*. I can't just raise the devil all night and sleep all day, and have—affairs. (She seems to turn the word over). Not that I'm any angel. But, I'd not know how, I'd be afraid. I really don't want to. I'd fall in love and get the worst of it. I'm a hulk—a baby—and I'm just sick with the blues. I'm hopelessly good American. I'd like to be bad, but I can't get away with it.

Elsie stiffens, moves nearer to Cosgrieve, looking him in the eyes. He meets her half way, folds his arms, looks back at her.

That's what you'd like to make of me, wouldn't you? But you fool yourself more than you fool me, John Cosgrieve! That's a man's life, eh?—half the time fooling his family and all the time fooling himself? You've had it on your mind, haven't you?—so much on your mind that you've got it into your mind, too. Almost! You'd like to take me and fall off the map with me, for a few wonderful little weeks,

Cosgrieve looks straight into her eyes. She stands away from him, baffled by his steadiness.

Cosgrieve: Yes I would like that, Elsie.

Elsie: Well, you take it from me, you'd not

like it long. I've got a conscience, and there's a lot of me when I'm blue. I'd get homesick for the ways of my own boy-and-girl country. Your money and my money would only make it worse. There wouldn't be a blessed thing to wish for. And it can buy a lot. I'm no angel. I'm not pretending. I'd have a grand time for a few days. But it's not good enough. It's not! (Her eyes fill, and she looks at Cosgrieve as if for help) Oh, I'm all mixed up!

Cosgrieve: Be sensible and divorce Raymond, Elsie. Clean that up to start with. It's not so bad; just form. Words and red-tape. Get yourself free and other things will take care of themselves.

Elsie: (Flares in temper) Why don't *you* get a divorce, if it's so easy. Why wouldn't you feel better to be *free*, too? What's this funny *difference* between you and me?—a man and a woman? You and me!

Cosgrieve: I have no reason for divorcing my wife, Elsie. She is much too good for me. We won't talk of her—please!

Elsie: (Looks at him a long moment, then turns and looks at the house down the road). For that matter, I haven't either. The reasons

are all Bill's. Being free wouldn't change anything—wouldn't change any of the funny differences, would it? Free! Regular little clown of a word, eh?—jumpin' about and lookin' two ways for Sunday?

Cosgrieve: Don't be so dreadful!

Elsie: The truth isn't too sweet, is it? (Comes close to Cosgrieve and stands to her inches) You want to know what I'm going to do with my freedom?

Cosgrieve: I want to know more than I want anything else just now.

Elsie: (Mocking him) Just now! Well, you will see what I'll do with it. I'm going to fool the last manjack of you. (Turns her back, moves to her chair, and picks up her long silky coat). What time did you say you have dinner?

Cosgrieve: We dine at eight o'clock.

Elsie: (Strokes her coat, laughing at him) *Dine*, do you! It's quite sure that Bill will come in tonight?

Cosgrieve: Yes. He will come. He doesn't dream that you are here, or even in France. He is coming, he thinks, to meet Dunbar. I feel rather a rotter about it, but if you are determined to see him, the quicker the better.

Elsie: Talking sense at last!

Elsie stands, smiling oddly. She looks at her diamond wrist-watch and moves to the salon door along the path between the flower-beds. She stands on the steps smiling at Cosgrieve. Cosgrieve, all patience, stands against the terrace wall watching her. She waves a hand that glitters, and disappears into the house.

SCENE FOUR

It is eight o'clock. Cosgrieve and Dunbar, dressed as in the other scenes are waiting for Elsie in the beautiful old salon, with its many windows and high class doors giving upon the garden, the terrace, the tilleuls. Cosgrieve is mixing a cock-tail, the ingredients in fine old crystal, on a lacquered tray.

Dunbar: (Looking about) Going to leave the place as it is, Cosgrieve? This room is certainly fine.

Cosgrieve: Just as it is, only cared for, till it's strong again! (Laughs softly) That's what everything over here needs, and we are rich,

and it's up to us. (Whispers) Good God, Dunbar!—Look at Elsie!

The two men stand astounded. Elsie superbly vulgar and theatrical in a dress of beads and chiffon, crystal at her scarcely covered breast and shading down to sapphire at her feet, jewels all over her, a great blue feather fan in her hand, comes, painted to a mask, her head high, comes into the room. The old servant bows low to cover his astonishment and closes the door. She stands, insolently fanning herself, smiling at their consternation. They are overwhelmed, embarrassed, astounded, speechless. Elsie takes a cock-tail, then another. She goes to the mirror and reddens her mouth again. Cosgrieve holds himself, looks at Dunbar, shrugs. Dunbar grins, staring at Elsie's back. She sees them in the mirror, turns sharply and looks them down. Dinner is announced. Dunbar stands, bowed double, in cynical homage, as Elsie passes out of the room. The two men follow.

SCENE FIVE

Back in the salon after dinner, the coffee being served. The dusk hangs at the tall

windows, and the doors are open upon the old garden. Larkspur and hollyhocks, tall, pale, like flower-ghosts. The servant lights the candles on the mantleshef, the many lights softly reflected in the beautiful old mirror. Elsie, in her outrageous paint and clothes, sits idly drinking her coffee. The men are chattering together, of things and people she knows nothing of, ignoring her, punishing her stupidity.

Cosgrieve: (Suddenly to Elsie) Elsie, it is bad enough to surprise Raymond with your being here, you yourself. Go, like a good girl, and get your clothes on, and wash your face.

Dunbar: (Seconding him eagerly) Do go, kiddo! What's the great idea in making yourself look—like this? (Touches her glittering beaded dress).

Elsie: (Considers herself in the mirror of a vanity-case in her hand) Don't you get the "great idea" Joey? (Suddenly to both of them) Will you two kindly leave Bill, my clothes and my—great ideas (laughs) to me?

Cosgrieve stares at her unbelievably, bows with a faint smile and turns, as if hopeless, back to Dunbar.

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Dunbar: Really, Elsie, you've lost your head.

Elsie: You'd be sure to see it that way, Joey.

Cosgrieve, with an air of frankly having more than enough, rises. Dunbar, quite upset and puzzled, rises. Elsie looks out at the garden, fans herself indolently.

Cosgrieve: Come outside, Dunbar. I hear Raymond—I don't care to be here.

The two men exit to the garden, go to the terrace smoking, walking slowly. Through next scene they can be seen from time to time, walking, walking, up and down under the tileuls.

SCENE SIX

Alone, Elsie rises and hurries to mirror and peers at her reflection among all the lighted candles. The door opens, the old servant's black sleeve, touch of white cuff and his old hand upon the silver-lustre door-knob showing a moment. A big shadow enters, the door closes, and in the mirror Elsie sees Raymond standing, in his boots and grey flannels, against

the pale grey door. She turns, arms upon the mantel-shelf. Raymond sees her. She laughs. He is petrified. Elsie picks up her great blue feather fan and vanity things, and moving the fan lightly, looks Raymond over.

Elsie: Good heavens, Bill, I wish Mama could see you. You might as well be back in the little old States.—What's all this old stuff over here doing for you—in your flannels and boots, at ten o'clock in the evening? Ugh! Can't you get over it?

Raymond chokes, jerks his collar, can't find his words.

Elsie: (Laughs at him—laughs loud, with her painted mouth open. Sits with her knees perilously crossed, fanning herself) I say, Bill, sit down, *can't* you?

Raymond shudders, moves a step closer, peering at her unbelievably. He comes still nearer, bends over her as if the dusk baffled him, as if he'd lost himself, his reason. Elsie, her fan against her mouth, peers back. It is a moment of edges, close to chaos. Raymond retreats.

Elsie: Gee whiz, what's the use of all this play-acting, Bill? All I want is to know if you'd

like a divorce? *Do* you, Bill—want a divorce, I mean? (wistfully, in spite of herself).

Raymond: (Unsteadily) Divorce? I don't know. I've never thought about it. Perhaps. Our paths seem to have divided—

Elsie: Ye'p—they've divided all-right, all-right. I never thought you'd be the one to go to the bad.

Raymond: (Furiously) Bad? Damn it, *you!* You don't know what bad means.

Elsie: Thanks awfully. (laughs) You precious old dub—you blessed hick! Bill, you *are* a sight. You don't know how to have a good time, do you? Never did. You ought to do as I do. You know what they call *me*? Guess, Bill! (She doubles over laughing, and showing her shoulders alarmingly) The men I know, I mean. (Waves her fan towards the terrace where the two men can be seen, mere shadows, walking).

Raymond: (Savagely) What do they call you?

Elsie: (Watching him, absorbing him and his ready indignation, lets her eyes droop an instant. Then, laughing again) Why they call me *The Hairpin Duchess!* Some title, eh?

Raymond gasps, his face white and set. He watches the two men walking up and down, his fists unconsciously clenched. She laughs again. His hands relax and he hangs his head in shame of her.

Elsie: Can you blame 'em? *I don't. Of course they don't know that I know they call me that. They'd have fits if they knew I knew. They're awfully kind. Nice fellows, eh? I'm sort of gone on Cosgrieve. I overheard 'em one night when we were dining at a n'other fellow's apartment. Cute place, he had. And, some cook! Gee, what a feed, Bill! It was a night after the races. I heard one of 'em who is a n'author call me it—and they all laughed like one o'clock. So did I—laugh, I mean. The Hairpin Duchess, eh? Well, somebody's got to keep up the little old Duke-and-Duchess game, eh? It's a step up from being guyed about my hairpin money, anyhow. (Laughs)* Good night, Bill, cheer-up! Somebody's got to make hairpins. You act as sensitive as Mama!

Raymond: (Whispers) Oh—God!

Elsie: (Stares at him) Gee whiz, *I don't care. What's it to me? The main thing is that I've got the dough to play the part with. Let*

'em call me what they darn well please, so long as they dance to my tune. What's money for? Tell me that? (Suddenly) I'll get a divorce right away. I came down to tell you Bill. I want to play fair. Then you get married to that little sketch of yours, eh? Much safer, and less trouble. You, with your Sunday-school past—you must worry like the dickens about yourself and her? I'll get it fixed up as quick as I can. It's as easy over here now, as at Reno! Money certainly can make 'bout anything jazz, even law-an'-order. Of course you've got to act as if you never heard of money, and look the other way! (Laughs and fans) That's the French of it, eh?

Raymond rushes away from her, the crash of glass as he flings the door to behind him fairly shocking the still night and halting the two men, walking on the terrace, as if they had been struck. Without looking back, Raymond stalks down the garden path and disappears. The garden gate slams in the stillness. Cosgrieve and Dunbar come running. Cosgrieve pushes the broken glass aside on the steps, and comes into the room, followed by Dunbar. Elsie is sitting straight in her chair her fan and

vanity-case on the floor, staring fixedly at the door. They stand before her, trying to understand her. She looks up at them, her eyes heavy with fatigue and paint. She rises, steps carefully across her fan, goes unevenly to the mirror, the lights. She looks at herself, her hands gripping the shelf. She looks down at her hands. She gives a choked sound, pulls off her rings, her bracelets, all her jewels. She takes her handkerchief and wipes off the worst of the paint. She turns, leaning there before the lights, her lovely hair bright about her face, her face pearly in the shadow against the light. She glances at Dunbar with a wavering smile, then looks fully at Cosgrieve.

Elsie: You aren't to think, you two, that I got myself up like this to be—funny! Nor to please myself, or Bill. I—just did it, you see, to cure Bill of any hangover pipe-dream he might have had about me. He's cured! I'm sorry about the broken glass. Jo—on my bed upstairs is a sweater. 'Mind getting it for me? Don't ring for a maid, please, Cosgrieve! I've acted enough, for one night!

Exit Dunbar, hastily. Cosgrieve stands by the broken door, looking into the garden.

Elsie stands very still, looking at Cosgrieve. Her mouth quivers. She bites her lip, gets hold of herself, lifts her head.

Elsie: Cosgrieve, will you do something for me?

Dunbar enters, sweater in hands, and goes to Elsie, holding it for her.

Elsie: (Slipping her arms into sweater) Jo, will you, and Cosgrieve, do something for me?

Dunbar: Give us a chance, kiddo!

Elsie: (Sighs) I like to be called "kiddo." (Looks at Cosgrieve a moment, then with her head high) Will you two just wipe up the earth with the next person who calls me a Hairpin Duchess? Because—it hurts my feelings—to be called that—

The two men, wholly confused, look at one another. Elsie fastens her sweater, drops all her jewels into her handkerchief, and that into her jersey pocket, then, bravely, as if nothing had happened she lights a cigarette at one of the candles, and goes toward the door.

Elsie: Come on outside? Let's have a smoke in the fresh air! God bless a dark night and fresh air!

She laughs over her shoulder. She goes out into the garden, the two men following her, holding one another by the arm, looking at her whom they have hurt for the good of her soul.

XIII

THINKING OF PAPA

IT was Cosgrieve's party, "up the hill," at a happy Montmartre haunt. If haunts are happy. Good things to eat, champagne, jazz, gay wise eyes, and confetti. Cosgrieve, since Elsie's meeting with Raymond, had not seemed to be able to do enough for her. He liked her, frankly. He seemed to have come out into the open, recklessly, under his circumstances, where before he'd been afraid of her possible recklessness.

Elsie, with something new in her effect, and very lovely in brown and silver tulle, with shoulders like velvet, her eyes hard and made up, her voice as hard and perhaps as made up, sat between Cosgrieve and Dunbar, with Seymour and Nelson opposite them. A week had

gone by since she had seen Bill Raymond. Before she saw him, she had talked of nothing else, and talked a great deal. Since, she had been all but silent. She said she was "growing a shell." She'd refused to do things, and often dined alone. Then Cosgrieve phoned instantly. talked a great deal. Since, she had been all but silent. She said she was "growing a shell." She'd refused to do things, and often dined alone. Then Cosgrieve phoned instantly. "You are no good, Elsie, as a nun. Tonight you are coming just where I say, and you are going to have a wonderful party and a good time. Ask anyone—as many as you like—only, tell me how many, so I may get the party going."

In a moment Elsie made up her mind, her new-grown mind. It was as good a way as another of saying good-bye to them. If she could count upon herself to go through with it? She stood staring at herself in a mirror with the telephone in her hand. "You are a perfect dear," she told him, beginning absently. "There will be four of us, and you."

"Four of you and me? I like that!" Cosgrieve laughed. "I'm a dear, of course, but not

as perfect as all that. Who am I to talk with, to dance with? Who'll be there to dine with me?"

"Oh, I'll be there, you know," she answered.

She arrived at the hour, with her three—Seymour, Dunbar and Nelson—to Cosgrieve's great amusement. The dinner began gaily, the young men all with a great deal to say to one another. Nelson was about Cosgrieve's age, and they had not met before. Elsie smoked while they talked; looked over the place, catching, holding, throwing off glances of all sorts of admiring eyes, indifferently. The four young men tried to interest her, but she seemed vague, contented to listen. Clever, keen, young, they interested one another, and they forgot her and let her be. She became merely their brown and silver bibelot, with her glass well filled, and of course protected. Perfectly protected. They were there. And while they talked eagerly of oil-fields, Elsie smiled at a solitary Englishman—an on-looker too, without even the appearance of companions. "Funny as an iceberg," thought Elsie, amusing herself. He was immensely good-looking, her Englishman, and tall. With evidence of shock, of fine distress,

he returned her disconcerting American smile. Then he carefully looked over her men. Poor Elsie. The men were all right. It was Elsie he found, not wanting, but—. His next smile was neither shocked nor distressed. Elsie stiffened and sat closer to her table, to her men, her protectors. She could not seem to play the game, any game. She wished she hadn't smiled at the silly man. A man who couldn't understand a smile!

"Penny for your thoughts, old dear," said Dunbar.

"Not enough, Joey. I wasn't thinking of you, so it would be too much, wouldn't it?—a whole penny?"

"Your highness is somewhat edgy tonight?" Nelson suggested, looking gaily into her eyes.

Elsie had not seen Nelson since her dinner with him at the Rotonde, when he'd unforgivably sent her home alone in a taxi at half-past nine o'clock. She knew nothing of his visit to Judith Ardley, or that he'd plans for her. "Oh no," she looked away from his glance. "Not as bright as all that. I'm just bored."

Cosgrieve sat up and looked at her curiously. "Will you dance?" he asked her, standing by

her chair, dodging confetti from a slim, jewelled hand at a table near by.

"Thanks. 'Love to."

They danced, eyes following them. All sorts of eyes for as many sorts of reasons. Men's and women's eyes; critical, jealous, admiring eyes.

"When will you dine with me alone, Elsie?" Cosgrieve asked her.

Over his shoulder she saw the Englishman's cold, covetous eyes following them. Cosgrieve was startled by a very simple sigh.

"Something gone wrong again, Elsie?" he insisted.

She looked him full in the eyes. "I thought that everybody knew that everything had gone wrong," she answered him.

Back at their table Dunbar said, close to her ear, "You dance wonderfully well, old dear. My turn next?"

"Too wonderfully, Joey, thanks," she moved her chair away from him a little, scarcely more than a gesture, but eloquently.

The others laughed. Elsie looked them over, one after another. They were drinking too much; even Nelson was drinking more than

usual. The place was suffocating, the air tortured with paper ribbons and confetti. The Englishman was becoming very pink, was drinking too, and staring at her absorbantly with his round pelican eyes.

"I say, old dear, who's your friend?" chuckled Dunbar.

"Joey, if you call me 'old dear' once more, I'll go over and *dine* with him. That's who he is!" she told Dunbar. She met Cosgrieve's surprised glance, considered the fuddled indignation upon their four flushed faces. She laughed at them. "He would at least give me his undivided attention. That's also who he is."

"My dear child," murmured Nelson. "What a pristine plaint!"

Elsie looked back at him. Drink was not improving him. He looked less fine. "Pristine? I don't know what you mean. I can't talk in words of more than one syllable, you know. Not yet!"

"If," Nelson went on, "there is one thing that irritates a modern woman more than another, it is a man's undivided attention."

"Well," said Elsie, "I guess they won't many

of 'em die of irritation then." She smoked, and she twirled her fingers making the smoke spiral and ruffle. "I'm going home," she said suddenly.

They stared at her, astounded into sobriety.

"But it's *early*, Kiddo dear!" wailed Dunbar, who'd come across a pair of bright brown eyes that seemed to be seeking his undivided attention.

Elsie looked from one to the other, amazed, then she laughed. "*Goodnight!* I don't mean now, tonight, to my hotel. That's not *home!* I mean next Saturday, on the 'Paris.' 'Back to the farm' stuff."

"But why? Why? Why? Why?" they chorused, bending to her.

"Oh," she said, "to pack up over there, and to break away from all of the crazy-ness-ness over here."

They became momentarily quite sober. Nelson especially was clear, his curious look of light glistening upon his face. "What—after that?" he asked her.

Elsie found her voice, and she had her something to say to her now wholly attentive audience. She sobered them, dominated them,

held them, with the mere force of her good common sense and her made up mind. She owned to simple wants and longings. She wanted a life worth the trouble; worth the outrageous price. She was sick of jazz and paper ribbons. She had a divorce started. She was free to go home for three or four weeks, if she kept a room and an address. "Then I'll have old Bill off my conscience!" She used the word 'conscience' just as a shower of confetti fell on her. She seemed not to see or feel the dazzling bits of paper. "Then I'm going to fix up a place to live in. My own place. My very own. And then," she said with a glance half brave, half supplicating, for Nelson, "I want to study. French, of course, and—everything. I—want to know what people are talking about. It's not much fun—" this time Cosgrieve got her glance, "being a side-show. The biggest-blond-on-earth sort of thing."

"Bravo, Elsie," said Nelson applauding softly. He bent forward eagerly, and it was a good thing that a little too much to drink had melted his usual cynicism, for he let her see for once that he was eager and sincere. "It's what

I've hoped you'd do. If you'll let me, I know a way to help you. A perfect way."

She listened to him, she studied him, she laughed softly, uncertainly. "You mean thing!" she was suddenly wholly frank. "You have helped me. You never let a break of mine get by. You've made me feel like the living image of 'all dressed up and nowhere to go.' What do you mean now, by a chance? A way? I want, awfully, to have a good time some day, but I don't care about being burned at the stake to get it. What are you driving at? What," she laughed gaily, "is the awful price?"

Then Nelson told her about Judith Ardley. He had written Judith that he wasn't sure about the dinner at her place as the best way to begin. He'd promised to let her know, to come again after he'd seen Elsie, and had talked over a plan.

Said Cosgrieve, "But I've met Mrs. Ardley! When my sisters were over for flub-dubs, before they got married. My mother knew her, and put the kids in her care. I met her once or twice after, during the war, and since her son was killed, we've been good friends. She's

charming. It's a great idea!" Cosgrieve, the American, was all alive with new interest, for he suddenly visioned Elsie as something to build over, to reconstruct.

"She sounds pretty wonderful," sighed Elsie, "but I hate to think what she will think of me."

"She'll like you," said Nelson quietly.

"You're suffering from fixed ideas, kiddo," said Dunbar. "Can't you get it through your little shell-pink ears that we all love you for yourself?" Dunbar was very fuddled.

"I know just as well as I care to just how you 'love' me, Jo Dunbar." She looked him full in the eyes. "I know that if you and I were to meet in our home town, I'd see just about as much of you as I used to."

Dunbar seemed unable to think of an answer. The other three sat back, looking at Dunbar gravely, examining each one of them, his own mind. Elsie smiled, watching them, but stuck to her point, for all that it turned back and struck herself.

"Look here now, kiddo," Dunbar began, "You know you aren't fair—"

"Better let it go at that, Jo," said Elsie.

Nelson laughed. "You are perfectly right,

Elsie. Every man-jack of us, as you like to put it, is looking for a chance to isolate you. You are wonderfully handsome. We like to show you off. We're strutting cocks, and selfish all through. Everyone of us."

"Not very high-brow, is it?" she commented. "That's all fun, but it's not good enough. No'p." Her painted mouth closed firmly, and she stared at her hands, and the careening smoke of her cigarette. "I'm going to train. I'm going to be trimmed. I'm going to get onto that game till even you, Richmond Nelson, won't be able to catch me in any of your darned little traps."

Nelson knew better than to set up any defence. "You'll do it, if you really care to. Your sense of self-preservation is quite as handsome as your shoulders, if not so entirely visible. But Judith Ardley is no trap-setter. She is your opportunity, Elsie. She's not going to brutally want to trim you. She'll make you happy. And you are equally her opportunity. You start neck and neck."

Nelson sketched Judith for her. Young, beautiful, rich, and married adventurously to a spendthrift musician who had, even so, made

her, after a manner, happy. He had died, leaving her a reduced income and a son. Mondaine, and at once fine in her courage, she'd shopped professionally to patch the holes in her fortunes, to give her son all that he should have. The son had been killed in the first year of the war. The war had reduced her already small income. At fifty and a little more, she was obliged to keep it up. And she'd keep it up, splendidly, conscientiously, and without complaining.

"That sounds good," said Elsie sensibly. After thinking a moment, she looked at Nelson. "But tell me facts." She bent toward him, her beautiful hands clasped before her, as if she'd force him to simple frankness. "I mean, how does she do the shopping? What can she do with me? She can't shop me, can she? I'm already pretty darned well shopped, it seems to me. When I get the blues, I always feel dead, like a wax woman in a shop window. What under the sun can I be to her? Tell me that!"

Nelson returned her eagerness. "You'll be superb as a team, once she's given you your pace, Elsie," he laughed. "You'll have a good

time together. She's much more beautiful than you are, for all that she's fifty."

A smile spread over Elsie's face, really gay. "Well, I like that!" She looked at Nelson curiously. He seemed, for the first time, quite young to her.

"That's that," said Nelson. "You've got the same racy nerve, but at present she's got all the meaning. But Elsie, she's had to work like a slave and look like a care-free idler. And she's tired. It's beginning to tell, to worry her. It isn't going to be easier, for she's getting older."

"Good night," murmured Elsie, "the poor dear!"

"Not at all," said Nelson. "She'll go through with that smile of hers, even if you do not cross her path—cross it, you know, with some of your comforting gold. And very few will ever know that she is tired."

Elsie gestured helplessly. "Please get down to brass tacks. What am I to do about it? Give her so much a year to buy my clothes? To make me look like one of those portraits you are so crazy about—those women in dotted swiss, at the show you took me to."

Nelson, the others imitating him, bent toward Elsie, closer. "Take her with you. *Travel*, Elsie! Go to Italy, Egypt, wherever you like. Live with her; eat, talk, read with her. Let her guide you in your clothes, your friends. Make her your friend. Let her know you. You'll keep her young. She'll teach you to grow up. Then you can come back here and have that apartment you are always talking about. You'll have a wonderful time together. Will you let me bring you together?"

Elsie sat looking past them, past the patiently, carefully ogling Englishman, a strange something like light that they had never caught upon her face before.

"Now what is it?" Cosgrieve asked her. "You aren't to let Nelson bully you into anything you don't want to do. You are very nice as you are, you know."

Elsie laughed softly and got out a lacey handkerchief and dabbed her eyes, making a little fun of herself. "I was just—thinkin' of Papa," she told them.

Not a voice answered her till, ardently, Jo Dunbar came forth from his mists with "By Jove, Kiddo, you are a peach!"

Elsie held herself. When she spoke again her voice was hard. It simply had to be hard to be at all. "Mrs. Ardley sounds like a perfectly good proposition. If we—hit it off, I'll make her an offer. Write down her address," she handed Nelson her little gold and ivory tablet, "and I'll go right out to see her. I'll go tomorrow," she smiled.

Nelson wrote, smiling to himself over their subterfuge—their camouflaged dinner. Elsie swept the nonsense aside with her splendid common-sense. "I'll go right out and see her."

"Brrrrrrrrrrrrrr," shivered Elsie, the tablet back in her bag. "We are being solemn for a place like this! Anybody'd think we were signing a treaty. Little me, and you four Turks! I do wish—" she smiled at Cosgrieve, "that somebody'd ask me to dance—"

Elsie and Cosgrieve danced into the confetti-spangled throng the three other young men watching them.

"Give her two years of Judith Ardley and she will pity *you*, Dunbar," said Nelson. "If you want to stay on the band-wagon you'll have to change your tune."

“And you—?” Dunbar flushed, grinning but nettled.

“I? Oh I shall stick around and listen to the music,” Nelson smiled. “I’m not, you know, acquisitive.”

XIV

REMEMBER

ELSIE sailed. She left Paris, her arms full of flowers, her four friends and Judith Ardley waving her away. Small and precious they looked to her in the filtered light of the train-sheds, as the train moved out, unrolling space between them. She'd been over only a few weeks and it seemed an eternity. All there was of reality for her. Her divorce was launched. "I'm going home," she'd told Nelson gaily, "to bury my turquoise blue past." Then she was coming back again; back to Judith Ardley. "I'm twice her size," Elsie'd told her friends after meeting Judith, "but I'm going to be her perfectly good little shadow. She's simply sweet!" And they were fading from her, mere silhouettes now; Judith and the four

of them. Nelson and Cosgrieve, Seymour and Jo Dunbar. And Nelson, just at the last, moved forward and waved his hat, and Elsie answered with her hand. Then she sat in her corner and cried a little into Cosgrieve's orchids. The five went their ways of course, life going on for them as it always had, and would. But Elsie had brought them so oddly close together. And Judith was greatly amused over the constant solicitations they all "invested" in her. "Really," she said, as she got into Cosgrieve's car to leave the station, "I feel as if losing her, we'd lost our balance!"

Then a shocking thing happened. It was all over in a few days after Elsie sailed. Nelson died.

He sold a short story for a good price; was gay about it, and, to celebrate, took Judith to the Grand Prix. Cosgrieve begged to go with them, took them in his car, Nelson permitted the fun of paying the entries. The afternoon was radiant, the turf like emerald, the clothes magnificent. Judith, friends about her, was delightful, exquisite. They won and lost, lost and won, gaily. Nelson made a scoop, was very gay about it—had liked the color of the

jockey's hair, or something equally inessential, and he'd won, the others losing. It was not a day of favourites, and color heightened rouge, and eyes shone with the gambler's haphazard brilliance. The day was beautiful. The mannikins strutted—lovely! One beautiful creature, tall and slight, crisply-curled black short hair, and a skin like golden satin, paced the place in orange taffeta—tight of bodice, sleeveless, gloveless, fringed ruffles of the soft stuff sweeping the green, and to keep off the sun, in place of a hat, she carried, delightfully, a little black parasol. With her there minced along a marvelous young man in top-hat and tight-waisted clothes. Judith, enchanted, turned to Nelson to be sure he had seen them—the golden beauty and her doll-like man. She gasped, and caught at his sleeve. "What is it? Nel' you are *ill*?" He was pale as the death that was already dogging him.

Baffled, he peered back at her. "I don't know what it is. The air's soggy isn't it? I'm cold."

"It's not soggy, not cold at all. Come at once—" She rose, Cosgrieve beside her.

"You don't mind going? You—Cosgrieve?"

We could get a taxi—" His teeth were chattering.

For answer Cosgrieve took his arm. They hurried him out, Nelson's pallor making its moment of flurry. A bad loser, the crowd probably thought him, and then forgot all about him.

Nelson, shivering and cold, crouched in the back of Cosgrieve's luxurious car, neither asking help nor resenting it. Judith put her wrap over his knees, sat close to him, watched him. Nelson seemed oblivious. They took him to Judith's apartment. She put him to bed in her son's room while Cosgrieve went for the doctor.

Judith, alone with him, bent down and stroked his hair. He looked up and his eyes filled with tears. "I've got a perfectly ghastly pain," he confessed. "No—not the old wound at all. My shoulders, my back—" and he fainted.

In the morning they took him to a nursing-home, Cosgrieve arranging everything, ignoring any protest in Nelson's sometimes conscious eyes. To end the protest he bent down and put a hand on Nelson's hand a moment. "Give

me the happiness of feeling good for something, Nelson." And Nelson's eyes closed with the faint shadow of a smile, consenting, grateful. In a short time they'd become good friends, Nelson and Cosgrieve.

Cosgrieve, Judith and a nurse rode with him, in the great cradle-like ambulance. Nelson, from his pillow, his eyes vivid from the flare up of strength to meet the emergency, looked out on the green of trees and sward, and the blue and silver of summer sky. Sharply he closed it all out again. "It is a lovely day," said Judith softly. "Too lovely," he answered, and for the rest of the way he lay very very still, his hand in hers.

He made a good fight, but his old wounds had weakened him, and pneumonia is a bad enemy. He had his whimsical moments, his difficult moments, but he was generally patient under pain, and obedient. They did their best to help him, to save him. They held to him right up to the great door of his night, where the cruel breathlessness ceased and he finally lost himself in peace.

A few hours before he died he had a good clear hour. He asked to speak with Judith.

The nurse obliterated herself in the deep window. "I'm done for," he told her. "I know. I don't seem to mind very much. I'd like to have written a few things well. But, even that isn't important. All of my papers are yours, Judith. The book is finished—queer how I got through with it so easily? The Marie-Lou book. Just let my people know the simple facts. I've very few people, very few facts. And," he smiled, "there's Elsie. She will feel very badly." He hesitated, then a little grimly, "On the table in my studio is a manuscript—a fool-thing called Men's Rights. It's not for publication. It's for Elsie. Will you give it to her? And Judith, —give her a chance. I want Elsie to win. And Judith, thanks for being so very good to me. You are precious. I'll always be thanking you." His voice all but faded and the poor breathing became difficult again. The nurse came to the bed, shook her head with a smile for Judith, who rose. Nelson read the smile, but reached his hand out to Judith. It was a pale hand—a dry thing, a leaf ready to fall. She held it between her own. His thoughts had held to their thread across the difficult moment. "Always be thanking you," he repeated. Then he

smiled. That smile of his, like a light upon his face. A glistening light. "I don't mean—any—ghost-stuff. I only mean—you'll remember. Always, Judith dear. It's remembering that makes an eternity—"

XV

MEN'S RIGHTS

(The manuscript letter that Richmond* Nelson asked
Judith to give to Elsie)

Elsie, my dear, you are a disturbing person. You are too beautiful. Sometimes too imperfectly beautiful to be endurable. And how your beautiful imperfections reek of promises! It terrifies me to think of what you may become, for good or for evil. There is so much of good about you that you lead me, even hard-shelled me, to think in platitudes. You go about reducing men to "good dogs" by the mere beautiful abundance of your goodness. Just what you may become—? Elsie, Elsie! As you are now, you have reduced four of us. Five, counting your Bill Raymond. The four of us, as

young men go, know our way fairly well. Bill, I deeply suspect, (so deeply that I sometimes succeed in forgetting him) is the only one of us that very much matters to you. You have drawn the rest of us together—fairly knotted us together with your superb, your lovable clumsiness. We have fallen very low in our maudlin desire to help you. Ridiculous! You are going, as sure as fate, to rise above us, to help yourself! You have made us eye one another, resent one another, deceive one another: men who have lived through the war together! We have secretly schemed ways of isolating you, each one for himself. And we've been very solemn about it, and pretentious, but really not at all to be good to you, but wholly to be good to ourselves. It makes something rather fine of a mere young man, going about with a splendid creature like you, my dear. Tonight, I've been walking down by the river, the pattern of leaves between me and the moon, and with the pattern of the leaves to go by, I've been thinking you in and out of the rather detached, and often lonely pattern of our four lives. For all our chatter, we are living over here in an exile, which, for all that it is vol-

untary, is no less detached. I've tried to be dispassionate about it. It is not easy to be dispassionate about you, Elsie.

There's Seymour first. I don't know why first, except that he is a clean-cut type with his way all laid out for him. He'd marry you, gobble you. He would, Elsie. You'd have a correct home in a correct quarter. He'd go daily to his bank with a clear, accepting, capable, and wholly credulous mind. He is worldly-wise enough to run well even the gilded and wholly correct life that, together, you would lead. But his wisdom ends there. He'd take you as you are without a dream of what you might have been. You'd have splendid motor-cars, children, an English nurse. And you'd accept it all in spite of yourself. You'd be handsome and stout—no, no, Seymour is not to matter for you. He must not. It is impossible to think of—a hopeless pattern, accepted by hopeless people. People who do not know enough to suffer, to re-arrange, to hope, to go against a fashion. Somewhere there is a girl of Seymour's own sort. Let them find one another. Give him to her, Elsie. You can afford to! The woman he marries will have every-

thing. And you, if you are to reach the last fine lines of your pattern, have got to have all but everything taken away from you. What I'm driving at about you and Seymour is that his is an official mind, and conventional. He'd place you by his side. And fully he'd expect you to stay there, radiant, but in the narrow way. No room for the beautiful creature you may be with air and light and freedom. May fate, or heaven, or even hell, save you, dear splendid, golden child, from any official keeping. From Seymour!

As for Dunbar, you could send him to ruin with a lift of your hand. And a revenge it would be for all the differences of your two home backgrounds. You'd be victims of the contempt of familiarity. A perilous beginning. Jo, with his snobbish provincial family, and you with your hairpins and your new money. You'd have all that, like stones up your sleeves, to fling at one another. Jo loves you just now, whatever that means. He burbles along beside you, gay and quite sweet, but he hasn't the slightest effect upon you. You probably saw through him in the light of your social differences when you were just a little girl, and little girls like

you (with long gold pig-tails) see with fatal clarity, and I think you do not forget. You'd never arrive at a feeling larger than tolerance for Jo, though you could enslave him. You'd either toss him about like so much gay confetti, use him as a good-looking upper servant to carry your gorgeous furs, or you'd teach him to stay back, to follow like a pet dog that knows better than to be a nuisance. Jo wouldn't be long about his demoralizing. He'd become a mere appetite running after you. He'd spend all that he has, and a lot of what you have, on orchids and bracelets, and not all for you either. He'd go mad, a Pierrot. He's a sweet chap, Dunbar, but not much of a pattern. Not for you, Elsie dear.

And Cosgrieve. I'm afraid to look too closely at you and Cosgrieve. It hurts me to see you together. He might be so very much to you. You are very beautiful together—very right. He dominates you, is your physical equal. He has more money than you have. You could look up to Cosgrieve. But child, even now, while you are so desirable to him—because you are putting him off, even now when he takes you out to dine he is careful of you,

keeps your glass filled, looks after your perfect comfort, but he turns to *talk* with us, with men. He has his shrewd American interest in large affairs. He plays his money over the earth's commerce, a big game. And if a woman were to come along who knew how to talk of politics, of diplomacy, of oil-fields, he'd turn away from you to talk with her. As you are now, you and Cosgrieve, things are dangerous, and ripe for escapade, but less dangerous than if your two lives were free for some fatal venture. If you were free to, you'd marry. Now, you would. You are not used to interference. You'd marry, if for no other reason than because it's the easiest way. And you may easily both become free. I can see you, in a train de luxe, rushing South, South! Gorgeous word, South! A gorgeous hotel, a suite of rooms, flowers, everything, all brought to vivid life by you. But that would pall upon Cosgrieve in a week. In heaven's name believe me that it would. (Where is Cosgrieve's wife, Elsie? and what is the trouble?) And if she, that other clever woman, came along he'd turn to her. And you, unwise child, who on earth would you meet, to compensate? A Jo Dunbar? The waste of it

is unthinkable. The sadness of it. You'd be snubbed by Cosgrieve's clever friends and, sooner or later, ignored by Cosgrieve. You'd make the best of it. Scenes, because you're frank and terribly truthful. Then you'd be bored. You'd be splendid-looking together, but satiated, airless. A second divorce—? That's not good enough for either of you—unthinkable even. I like Cosgrieve better than any American man I have ever met. We have an infinite capacity for friendship. And you and Cosgrieve are very much alike. Your difference is that tragic one, opportunity. And there's something terrible and sinful in the strength of his laughing ease and upholstered capabilities. To me they are, finally, forbidding. And I know that from his height he misses many things. Things that are sweet—like leaves, and the soothing beauty of their patterns in infinite and simple repetition. I don't see what you can be to Cosgrieve, Elsie, except a fling. That, if you will, heaven guard you! But flings won't keep you beautiful.

Elimination is bringing us home, Elsie, dear. Raymond is left, and I am left. And we two have not met. Dunbar has told me of him, and

so has Cosgrieve. Instinct tells me a great deal more. You, and instinct. Among the leaves, a beautiful tree in mid-summer, a vision of you and Raymond. I don't resent Raymond, and I do, profoundly resent the others. I like visioning you and Raymond meeting by chance, two or three years from now, when life is less difficult perhaps, and you have had all of that time with Judith Ardley. I see you—so clearly, Elsie!—A beautiful person, awakened and quieted. I can fancy you and Judith, perhaps at a theatre, in your loge, gay together and exquisitely dressed. It is a happy-go-lucky comedy that draws men alone, like Raymond. And women alone, like you and Judith. Raymond sees you—for the first time since that tragic comedy of your own at Cosgrieve's place. He sees you and Judith—friends dropping into your loge, or leaning upon the velvet rail to chat with you. You have learned how to chat. Judith's friends are your friends. You look happy, and you do not talk too much. I see Raymond, bewildered, hypnotized, make his careful way round to some shadow where he can see you, watch you, hear you. I see him get out of the place—rush out into the night

like a suffocating young god, back to the stars for light and belief. Then he gives in to his mortal chains. I've something of the boy's pet giant in my picture of Raymond: a young and very good giant in chains. I can vision what he'd do. He'd follow your beautiful car home in a careening taxi, and he'd stand half the night watching windows for a sight of you. Then one day after your luncheon with Judith, (I do so love thinking of you two together!) you'd have a letter from Bill. I can't open his letter, of course! but he tells you, among other things, that the girl long ago ran away with one of Cosgrieve's chauffeurs. That he's glad that she did. He tells you that he's lonesome, and never did know how to take care of himself. And you, Elsie dear, what then would you do with Raymond? What would Judith want you to do with him? I almost know. And it is so right that it convinces me, almost against my will, Elsie. Almost. There's night air stirring in the leaves. The pattern is blurred. Beautiful night air blurring the myriad leaves—

And here am I. I'd like to press my face against your hands—your beautiful hands, once for me without their rings—so close that at

last you would understand me. I, who do not understand myself? There's shere hope for you! I am complicated—two steps ahead and then three backward. The thought of ties, ruts, of everyday safety, revolts me. There are days when your wealth of colour and health are loathsome to me, and there are nights, nights like this, out under the leaves, when they are not. God, how they are not! I know how you are good, and that revolts me too, even as I tell myself that I am a fool, and unkind to you and to myself. What I want of you is all of you—but *free* of you. You are not a woman with whom a sensitive man may be free, and I am no fool, and I know it. You great, beautiful, warm, strong thing, you want being driven, and bullied, and worshipped, and protected, and I'd soon hate a woman who drove me to behaving like that sort of a man. That is horrible to me. The health and light of all that, and its sorts of love. When I was only eighteen, Elsie, Judith's cavorting husband gaily led me into a love like that. I did nothing else, thought of nothing else. It was the suicide of my youth. I don't want to die like that again. And now, forcing myself to confess, to look up to the pat-

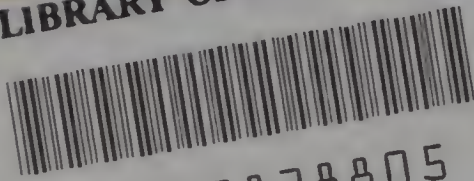
tern of the leaves again, I see the secret grey threads I've shuttled all through the pattern. Grey shadow-threads. I'm hoping, as I never have hoped for anything in life before, that Judith *quiets* you. Stills and changes you till you have become endurable to me. What a dream! A fool's dream, and selfish. Why should you, gorgeous and over-abundant Elsie, be changed more than I, than another? Do what I will about it, I go on insulting you with pity. It is insolence, and I know it, but I cannot help it. I love you and go on in my idiocy, looking down upon you. For I love myself better than I love you. But, it makes you turn to me. Makes you look at me. Lets me see my power to hurt you. Lets me see your beautiful clear tears. But, in spite of me and the 'dark flower' of my love, your own meaning will find the sun and the bright flowers. And when I see you like that, what will it do to me—in spite of everything, even Bill Raymond? Will I stay back in my night, watching you through the leaves, in decent possession of myself, and happy in your having Bill and your rightful simple happiness, or will I, like the cur that any man often is, remind you that *I* showed you the

way-beautiful, led you to the treasure Judith, gave you your chance? Am I capable of that? There are black places among the leaves, and they make the pattern rich. Terribly dark and rich. Who knows? And you, Elsie? What would you do with me?—a man turned cur, saying behind Bill's back, "I did all this for you. What are you doing for me? To be paid is a man's right." The leaves are stirring frantically, a storm threatening, the pattern is all but lost. Was it the coming storm that gave me the black thoughts?—cur's thoughts? Elsie, Elsie——

THE END

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